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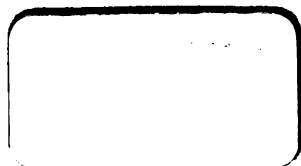
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Die alten, bösen Lieder,
Die Träume bös und arg,
Die lasst uns jetzt begraben.
Holt einen grossen Sarg.



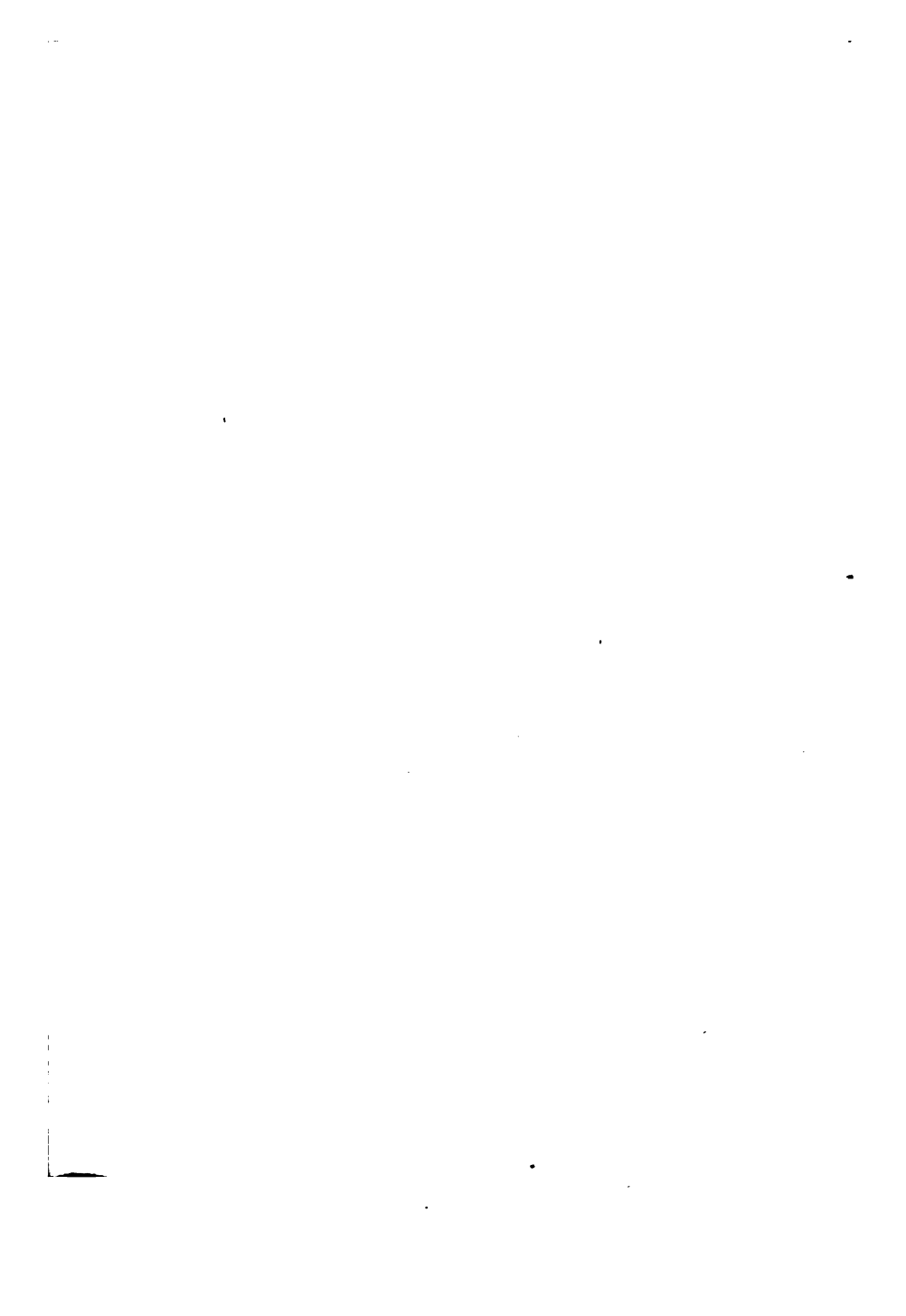
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PART I



CHAPTER I

WHEN Alfred Latham left Cambridge, in the early sixties, he carried with him the reputation of a person likely to make his mark in the world. Should he fail to do so, one of the dons told him, it would be not only disappointing, but absurd.

Certainly the outlook appeared excellent. In addition to his very creditable college record, the young man's possessions included a sound body and a fine intellect. He had no vices and no fads; a fastidious temperament, rather than any definite moral code, protected him against the grosser temptations, athletic habits and a sense of humour against the more subtle ones. The son of a cautious, old-fashioned country banker, he had grown up in pure air and wholesome surroundings, hampered neither by riches nor by poverty. His interests ranged from Assyriology to the improvement of drains, and he could take as keen a pleasure in watching a well-played cricket-match as in reading Dante or listening to an organ-fugue of Bach.

The one real passion of his heart was education for the masses. His dreams were of public libraries and free universities, of technical and physical

training for all, of evening lectures and model primary schools.

As he was the eldest son, it had been expected that he would become a partner in his father's bank; but when, on leaving college, he announced that he wished to be a schoolmaster, his relatives cheerfully acknowledged his right to choose a life for himself.

Their feeling changed when he refused a good opening which they had been at some pains to get for him, on the ground that he had already accepted a ragged-school post in the slum district of a northern factory town. Family and friends protested, earnestly but vainly. Of what use, they asked, could all his scholarship be in such a place? What could he hope to accomplish by wasting his talents on these rough Lancashire hobblederoys? "Just wait till my boys grow up," he would answer, "and you will see whether I can't do something."

They had not so long to wait. Within two years of leaving Cambridge he fell in love and married. His friends considered the choice a most happy one; his wife's beauty was apparent to all eyes, and the sweet face was an index to as sweet a character. Their only doubt was how a woman so gently bred and so weak in health could bear the material conditions into which her husband's enthusiasm dragged her. Poverty, drudgery, uncomfortable surroundings and a house subject to a perpetual invasion of grimy street-boys, were all very well, they said, for him, since apparently he happened to be so made as to like that sort of

thing. But didn't he think it was a bit hard on Mary?

However hard she may have found it, Mary accepted the position with angelic patience. Recognising from the first her intellectual inferiority to her gifted husband, she set him upon a pedestal and worshipped his every action. She was a devoutly religious woman; and though her husband's passionate struggle to win for the ignorant the privilege of learning seemed to her a less satisfactory form of charity than the blankets and soup-tickets of her girlhood, he was undoubtedly devoting himself to the poor, and must, therefore, she thought, be at heart a good Christian, though he did not always talk like one.

Still, for a lasting support against the daily pressure of so much discomfort, an imperfectly grasped second-hand scrap of somebody else's social ideal is not much. Too sweet-tempered to complain, Mrs. Latham soon found herself timidly wishing that Alfred's philanthropy could take a more usual and less disagreeable form. Then came difficulties, one upon another: sickness in the house, distress without; a financial crisis in the affairs of the school; and, worst of all, a clerical campaign against the schoolmaster, who was accused of poisoning the minds of his pupils with "Darwinism."

Mr. Latham himself only laughed at the attacks; but to his wife the blow was a crushing one. His tendency to say things which she could not understand had long been a sore trial to her gentle spirit. It could not wound her vanity, for she had none;

but it awaked in her a dim fear of something heretical and subversive—something which, did a higher power not protect her, might undermine the very foundations of her faith. She prayed earnestly to be delivered from doubt and spiritual temptation ; and it seemed to her at last that her prayers were answered ; her husband left off talking to her of disturbing subjects.

For that matter, he was getting out of the talking habit. Sometimes, when Mrs. Latham was feeling more than usually ill or depressed, a faint, cold doubt would come over her whether he still loved her as he used to do. Then, seeing how thin and careworn he had grown of late, she would reproach herself bitterly for wronging so good a husband by so unjust a thought.

Later on, the question that she asked herself took another form : Why had he left off loving her ? Had she failed in her duty as a wife, perhaps, since the baby came, by being too much a mother ? Or was fickleness, indeed, the nature of menfolk ; and had he tired of her because she was sick and her good looks were fading ?

She shed many tears in secret during this part of her life. As for him, he no longer asked himself questions ; they were all asked and answered. On his nature, which his wife in her secret thoughts had begun to call fickle, lay the curse of hopeless faithfulness. The ragged school was the core of his heart ; without it life would be worth little to him ; and he knew, long before she knew it herself, that in Mary it had a mortal enemy.

It was all his own fault, he told himself. Mary, poor soul, was in no way to blame. She was a good woman, but she was the wrong wife for him; and he, with the clearer intellect, should have been the one to see. He had made the mistake, and must bear its consequences as best he might; must carry on his work side by side with a home life that was a hindrance, not a help; and make her as nearly happy as he could. Altogether happy he could scarcely make her; some one of his clerical detractors would have been the person to do that, he thought bitterly; but he could be a kind and affectionate husband, and never let her see what it cost him.

The second child, a girl, was born three years after the marriage. When it was a week old Mr. Latham sat one evening by his wife's bed, holding her hand tenderly in his while he read aloud to her. The poem which she had chosen described the emotions of some pious lady tourist on seeing the Mount of Olives. The very cover of the anthology that contained it sent a shudder down his fastidious back; but had the verse been Milton's, he could not have read it in a more reverent and careful voice. He was thinking, as he glanced over the top of the book at his wife's delicate profile: "I can understand the poor thing not minding the bad logic, but how can she bear those cockney rhymes?"

"Alfred," she said when he came to the end; "I think, if you don't mind, I should like to call the baby 'Olive,'"

He could scarcely restrain a movement of disgust.

"What, after this poem?"

"No, not exactly that; only the word reminded me of . . . something else. But if you don't like the name, we will choose another."

"I like it very much," he answered gently. "It reminds me of things, too."

She looked up at him, smiling through tears.

"Does it really? Oh, Alfred dearest, I'm so glad!"

Her thin fingers began to play nervously with the stud of his cuff.

"It is ungrateful in me, when you are always so good and kind. . . . But . . . I don't know why . . . I have thought, sometimes, you had forgotten . . . everything but the school. . . . Do you remember . . . that sunset from Monte Oliveto, and the walk back to Florence in the dark?"

He winced a little, but forbore to explain her mistake to her; and they kissed each other across the baby's head, thinking, she of their honeymoon among gray Tuscan hills, he of drowned hopes and of the dove that returned not again.

Something over a quarter of a century later, Mr. Latham, now the gray-haired director of Latham's Bank in Sussex, drove his pony-trap one day to the railway-station at Heathbridge, three miles from his house, to meet the down-train. It was a fine afternoon of early summer, and the hedges between which he passed were sweet with dog-roses and honeysuckle. For once, though he

was alone, the banker's fine and scholarly face looked almost happy.

The occasion was, indeed, a joyful one: his daughter Olive was coming home for a holiday. For the last seven years she had been living in London, first learning sick-nursing in hospitals, and later working as a district nurse in a Surrey-side slum. As a general rule, she came back for two or three week-ends each winter as well as for her month in summer; but this year pressure of work had prevented small chance holidays, and it was now ten months since her last visit. For weeks he had been counting off the days, like a schoolboy at the end of term, telling himself every morning that another night had passed, and that she would come quite soon.

Only things connected with Olive could move him so nowadays. The years had brought him stability, if not peace; and though he sincerely loved both his wife and his pretty younger daughter, Jenny, either of them might have died without seriously disturbing the balanced habit of his mind. An excellent husband and father, he had lived his life and carried his burden alone.

But Olive held a place apart. It was to him as if the forsaken love of his youth, the ragged school, had come to life again. Her holiday visits, passionately as he looked forward to them, were as much pain as pleasure to him; so keen, through all his delight, was the sense of shame whenever, meeting her clear eyes, he asked himself what he had done with his youth.

The habitual cloud settled on his face as the thought came up once more. The leisurely life of a well-to-do country banker had not, in four-and-twenty years, rubbed out the stain left upon his memory by his desertion of the ragged school. He had left his first love, and its ghost still haunted him.

And yet, once having made the initial mistake in his marriage, what else could he have done? After Olive was born he had held out for two dreadful years; had held out against poverty and slander and mean intrigues, and Mary's silent, gentle, deadly influence; but her tears had broken his spirit at last. If she had ever quarrelled, or complained, or opposed him in any way, it would have been easier to stand against her; as a resigned and submissive victim she had him at her mercy. And yet he had still clung to the school.

Then the little boy, Alfred, had died of scarlatina, caught, no doubt, from one of the many ragamuffins who brought their confidences, their joys and sorrows, to "teacher"; and Mary had sobbed herself into an illness. "She has a horror of the place and the school, and everything connected with this slum work of yours," the doctor told him. "It's no use sending her to the country; she'll only fret. If you want ever to see her well and happy again, give the whole thing up, for a time, anyway."

He gave it up altogether, entered the bank, and succeeded in time to his father's place. So far as his wife's health was concerned, however, the sacrifice proved of little use; after Jenny's birth

she broke down entirely, and settled into a confirmed hypochondriacal semi-invalid. Still, if not quite happy, she was resigned, and, as always, sweet-tempered and patient. As for him, he had left off struggling against his fate, which was, indeed, not without compensations. From the point of view of his large circle of acquaintance, he had certainly nothing to complain of ; they regarded him as one of the rare and fortunate favourites of the gods, on whom only blessings are showered. Steadily prosperous, universally respected, a member of the Aristotelian Society, and the father of two admirable daughters, he had, no doubt, much to be thankful for.

He pulled up the pony, and, leaning out of the trap, gathered a spray of wild rosebuds for Olive. He knew how she would rejoice in the glory of these Sussex hedges after her long toil in flowerless places. Yet the work was of her own choosing ; never was anyone more radiantly happy in a loved profession, more clearly the right person in the right place. Her choice of a career was, at first, a sore grief to the timid mother ; but Mr. Latham insisted that no pressure must be put upon the girl ; she, at least, should go her own way untrammelled, and find her own vocation. She would probably do so, he reflected inwardly, even were there no father to take her part ; but this he did not say to Mary. He said instead : " The child will be all right, and none the worse for seeing a bit of what the world is like. She's strong enough to take the good of it and leave the bad ; it's not as if it were little Jenny."

Mrs. Latham wisely refrained from further opposi-

tion ; she had realized, perhaps, that it was seldom of much use to interfere with Olive. The girl had shown, from childhood, a placid evenness of temper, and an equally placid determination to manage her private affairs for herself. Starting for London at nineteen, to become a probationer in a children's hospital, she sweetly accepted the devout "Selections" and the "Poems of Frances Ridley Havergal," which were her mother's parting gifts ; and then, coming into the study with the gilded volumes, asked her father for "two of your cardboard cases, please, to keep these pretty bindings nice ; and some books to read when I can get off. I shall want only quite a few, because of course I shan't have much time at the hospital."

"Choose what you like," he told her ; and without further speech, she picked out half a dozen volumes. A glance at the titles sent his eyebrows up in silent comment. Epictetus, Milton's Prose, The Apology of Socrates . . . "Poor Mary!" he said to himself when the door closed. He said it again now as he laid the rosebuds down and touched up the lazy pony.

He remembered the day when he had first begun to realize that his elder daughter, then a child of thirteen, was, for good or evil, a force to be reckoned with. She had electrified the quiet household by walking in, perfectly self-possessed, with a ragged and very dirty baby in her arms, and the foul-mouthed female tramp from whom she had taken it following her up the drive, vociferously drunk, but too much amazed to be violent. "It's no use

saying bad words," she had remarked, sitting down calmly in the hall with her yelling prize. "You don't deserve to have a baby if you hold it upside down and make it scream. Go and put your head under the pump."

Mr. Latham laughed to himself at the remembered grotesqueness of the scene : the horrified servants, the frowsy baby, the mother's bestial rage collapsing in damp and sodden humility under the deadly common-sense of this small person with the square-toed shoes and the hair that would not curl.

But in the middle of his laughter, his heart contracted at the memory of the dreadful days last winter. She was to have spent Christmas at home ; and when her letter came, he had thought it was to say which train would bring her ; but the postmark told him all before he broke the envelope. It was from a town in the Black Country where a violent small-pox epidemic had broken out ; she had volunteered for work in the temporary isolation hospital. Then, for the first time in his life, Mr. Latham had acted upon an impulse of blind panic ; he had taken the first train to the place, with a wild notion of telling her he could not spare her, of begging her to give it up, to let someone else, someone less loved, less desperately needed, nurse the small-pox patients. He remembered the black half-hour of waiting in a little, meagre, whitewashed room ; the gleam of sunshine that entered with her ; the splendid poise of her head as she came up to him, tall and straight in her nurse's uniform, smelling of disinfectants. He had stammered some excuse for coming, had sat

talking of trifles for the few minutes that she could spare from her work, and then had gone away. He dared not think a cowardly thought in so brave a presence.

Now the epidemic was over, and she was coming home to rest and to look after her mother's health. For a few months, at any rate, the joy of having her near would fill the empty place in his life. Perhaps she might even consent to settle down and follow her chosen career at home. A trained nurse was badly wanted for the poor folk of the district; and his daughter had no need to earn her bread.

As he entered the station a porter came up, touching his cap.

"Is it true Miss Olive is coming home, sir?"

"Yes, for a time."

"That's good news; my old folks will be glad."

Mr. Latham smiled as he sat down to wait for the train. Whether he himself was liked or disliked by his neighbours was unimportant to him; but the popularity of his idol was another matter.

She was certainly popular. The news of her coming had spread abroad, and when she stepped out of the train, various small boys and awkward lads appeared from nowhere in particular, all anxious to carry her bag or help her into the pony-trap. She addressed them by their Christian names, and inquired with interest after the symptoms of a certain Jimmy, who, so far as Mr. Latham could gather from the conversation, appeared to have lately endangered his health by swallowing a pin.

"And may a profane outsider ask who is Jimmy?" said her father, as the pony-trap turned a corner, shutting out from view the ecstatic imps to whom she was still waving her hand.

"Jimmy Bates, a very particular friend of mine. Don't you remember the little boy that tramped all the way to Hurst bog and back last summer to bring me a lot of very smelly duckweed because he had seen me looking for the ivy-leaved harebell in a bit of wet ground and thought I liked 'all those slimy things'?"

"Ah, I remember a small adorer of yours with a shock head and a freckled nose. It is fortunate that your satellites are only village urchins and hobbledehoy; one daughter with a train of fashionable young men is enough for a plain man like me."

Olive's gray eyes lit up with amusement.

"Poor old daddy! Are Jenny's lovers very overpowering?"

"It's not the quality I mind, my dear; it's the quantity. They're harmless youths, I think, most of them; but a continual procession of well-intentioned puppies becomes a little wearing at times."

"It's no use, dad; I'm not going to pity you. It's your own fault for marrying mother; she must have been even prettier than Jenny when she was a girl."

He threw a covert glance at her, but her eyes were quite unconscious.

"She was much prettier than Jenny," he said.

"Well, then, you must put up with having a pretty daughter, and be thankful you've only one."

Think what your lot might have been if I'd turned out a beauty too."

"It's not a point of much importance, my dear ; but even you strike me as fairly pleasant to look at."

"Oh, I'm well enough ; just plain dog."

"And do you think that if you had Jenny's hair and skin you would neglect your sick mother for cavalry officers and young men down for the hunting season ?"

"Father," said Olive, suddenly grave ; "you're not anxious about Jenny ?"

"Anxious ? In the ordinary sense of the word, not in the least. Jenny will always swim on the top of the water and always be a model of propriety. She's made that way. But . . . well, yes, I'm sorry to see your mother's daughter grow exacting and vain, or your sister idle and selfish."

"She's not really selfish, dad ; she's young, and mother has spoiled her a bit. Now tell me about mother. Do you think her any worse ?"

"I don't quite know what to think. The doctor can't find much the matter now, except weakness ; but she's so depressed. You'll see for yourself. I'm glad you're home, for her sake as well as for Jenny's."

"And not for your own, daddy ?"

He put a hand on hers for a moment.

"We won't talk about that," he said, and plunged into another subject.

"By the way, your friend the Reverend Mr. Grey has arrived, and entered on his new duties yesterday. The old rector waylaid me last week to say it was

your account of how the young man had behaved in the small-pox epidemic that had made him decide to try him, but had I heard whether he was sound doctrinally? I told him I thought the amount of soap and disinfectants a curate can get his poor parishioners to use of more importance than the exact colour of his theology."

"Mr. Grey will agree with you there, at any rate; and I am sure he will be willing to let Mr. Wickham do the preaching if he may do the district-visiting. I doubt if he knows much about theological questions, but he knows how to bandage a sore leg, for I've seen him do it."

"Well, he'll be a change after the last curate, who neither could nor would do anything."

"Wasn't that an aristocratic young man with a retreating chin?"

"Yes, and a tendency to spout St. Augustine, out of season, when we wanted to settle practical points about the town drains. It wasn't even as if he really knew any Latin, either; he always got fogged in the verbs. This new man is a great friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Dick Grey? One of my best friends. I knew him well years before the small-pox time, when he had a London curacy; he used to visit my patients in Bermondsey."

"Your mother has got hold of a notion," Mr. Latham began, and broke off.

Olive looked up inquiringly.

"No, no, it isn't our business. It's only, as you are such friends . . ."

"Father, don't!"

The banker looked round at her in wonder. Her face was suddenly white.

"Olive?" he said, and caught her hand. "Olive, darling!"

"No, nothing, daddy; only don't ever talk to me about things like that. Any friends of mine you may come across—I haven't many—are just friends, and nothing more."

"But, my darling, somebody will be more, some day?"

She was silent, looking straight before her. Presently she turned her head, and looked him deliberately in the face.

"And those insanitary cottages; did you manage to get the matter taken up?"

Her father drew in his breath a little; it was as if a door had been shut in his face. He answered, after a scarcely perceptible pause:

"Not yet; I had the farmers against me. Perhaps, if Mr. Grey will back me up, I may succeed."

When the energetic Mr. Grey, cheerfully unconscious of the flutter which his Jaeger clothing and heathen ways had caused in the neighbourhood, came to pay his first call at The Chestnuts, he found Mrs. Latham walking up and down the garden-path, leaning on her tall daughter's arm. The invalid had gained more strength and energy within the last three days than in the three months before Olive came home. The girl was the tenderest and most sympathetic of nurses; but in such cases as her

mother's, her calm assumption that of course her patients could do this or that seemed to create in them the capacity to exert what little strength they had. Hers was a presence in which morbid fancies did not thrive.

Jenny, as usual, was amusing herself. She had gone to a garden party at the invitation of the local magnate, Lady Hartfield. Both girls had been asked, but, as one must stay with the invalid, Olive had refused the invitation, somewhat to her father's annoyance. He thought it was her turn to have a little pleasure now.

"It's all right, daddy," she had answered placidly. "It amuses Jenny, and it would only bore me."

Lady Hartfield was glad that it was Jenny who accepted. She was fond of the girl, petted her, and was loud in her praise to the eligible young men of the neighbourhood. "A really charming girl, and as good as she is pretty. Yes, the sister is a good girl too; wears thick boots, you know, and thinks of nothing but slumming and nursing the poor. Very fine, of course, but I prefer modesty and respect for the feelings of one's elders to all these exaggerated ways. There's no need for a young woman of good family to risk her life nursing small-pox; but it's true she never had Jenny's complexion."

This criticism had come round to Olive that morning, and she was repeating it to her mother as the curate approached them. Before she saw him he paused a moment to watch her in her new surroundings, and to think how splendid she looked,

supporting the weaker woman with her strong arm, her face lit up with frank enjoyment of a joke, the sunlight shining on her bare head.

When Mr. Latham's pony-trap came up the drive, the girl had taken her mother indoors, and was sitting under the big chestnut-tree with her friend, deep in a conversation on the ailments of a certain old woman in the village. From that subject they passed to another interest which they shared in common, the habits and peculiarities of wild flowers. The curate put down his teacup to drop on his knees before the rockery.

"Why, how on earth did you get the *Dryas* to blossom in this climate? It's such a difficult creature! What soil do you use?"

Jenny, coming back from her garden party, happy in her daintiest summer finery, stopped short in the path to stare amazedly at the spectacle of her sister kneeling by the rockery, absorbed in an earnest discussion of Alpine chickweeds with what seemed like a cross between a clergyman and a tramp.

"What an extraordinary person!" she remarked when the visitor had gone. "And what a waistcoat to pay a first call in!"

"My dear," her father replied, "that young man has a soul above clothes. He's a Christian Socialist, whatever that may mean, so you can scarcely expect him to know much about waistcoats."

"The waistcoat is all right," Olive put in tranquilly, collecting the scattered tea-things; "it's only that he dresses in Jaeger. Lots of Socialists do."

"And how do you come to be so conversant with the ways of Socialists, my dear?" her father asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"Oh," she answered carelessly; "I used to go to some of their meetings in London. Jenny, when you go upstairs, shut your door softly, please; mother has a headache."

She went into the house, carrying the tea-tray. Her father stood looking after her with a clouded face. He was wishing, rather bitterly, that he could hope ever to know anything at all about this elder girl of his.

"Father," said Jenny, taking off her best hat, and affectionately stroking its long white ostrich-plumes; "don't you think it's a pity that Olive lets her botanical craze carry her quite so far? She encouraged that dreadfully vulgar young man to stay much too long just because he pretended to be interested in groundsel."

"Chickweed, my dear; there's a difference from the botanist's point of view, if not from the Jenny Wren's."

"Well, chickweed, if you like. Of course, he'd say he was interested in anything. And Lady Hartfield told me this afternoon that he has the most extraordinary reputation. She says he would never have got appointed if people had known how he has been behaving in London: going to strike meetings, and getting into rows with the police, and all sorts of things. Don't you think you'd better warn Olive? . . ."

Mr. Latham's eyebrows went up again.

“ My good Jenny, there is a great deal of excellent advice to be had for nothing in this household. But Olive, I observe, neither gives it to others nor takes it when it is offered to herself. We all have our peculiarities. As for the young man in Jaeger, I would rather he talked about chickweed, of which he possibly knows something, than, like his predecessor, about dogmatic theology, of which he presumably knows nothing. And since we are in the way of good advice, let me advise you, my dear, to consider your sister a little more and that scandal-mongering old Hartfield cat a little less. And now you had better go in and put on a reasonable frock.”

CHAPTER II

MR. LATHAM had been right in his belief that many things would be different when Olive came home, but the difference was not altogether of the kind that he had hoped for.

As to the improvement in the mother's health and spirits, there could be no doubt ; the invalid, worn down by years of chronic weakness till she had lost all hope and almost all desire for recovery, began to wake out of her apathy of depression and realize that she, too, had a part in the joys of summer. The change in Jenny was no less striking ; she became more considerate for others, less wrapped up in her own small interests ; yet Olive had not once suggested to her that any change was needed ; she acted upon her sister's weaker nature, half unconsciously, by the sheer force of her personality.

Yet the dead weight of disappointment lay heavy on her father. It was not that Olive was hard ; her gentle cheerfulness never failed ; but there was a professional quality about her sympathy that froze the heart of the lonely man. How he had longed for her coming ; how he had waited and possessed his soul in patience ; how he had assured himself,

month after month and year after year, that Olive would come home, that Olive would understand ! And now that she had come the blank was greater than before.

He had scarcely even tried to approach her ; it had been hopeless from the beginning. Two days after her return he had taken her out driving in the pony-trap ; and, alone with her between the sweet hedges, had given her, in the shy, half-reluctant way of a man naturally reserved and long used to silence, some small hint of his secret grief. She had not wounded him by any tactlessness ; she had listened with grave attention, with respectful sympathy—in short, with the entirely admirable and entirely impersonal bedside manner of the well-trained sick-nurse. The next morning, coming down to breakfast, he had found small pepsine tablets laid beside his plate. And there his attempt to establish confidential relations with her had ended.

The Jaeger-clad curate, for his part, devoted himself to the physical training of the village boys, and lived in hope. He had realized long ago that Olive Latham would not be an easy bride to win ; and he had kept his personal hope in the background, setting himself to conquer slowly, first her interest, then her respect, and in time her friendship. Whether her love would ever follow or not, he had at least gained these. After three years of steady effort, he had still not converted her to Socialism ; her intellect, stubborn and thorough, moved slowly, and her nature was not prone to quick enthusiasms. But she had read and pondered deeply the books

with which he had supplied her, and they had set her thinking. Now, when alone with him, she would enter upon serious discussions, weighing rival theories with conscientious and pathetically ignorant criticism. "She won't be easy to convert," he had said to himself at the beginning of their intimacy; "but she'll be worth the trouble." After three years he was still encouraging himself with the same thought.

He had come down to Sussex resolved to put off indefinitely any intrusion of his personal feelings and hopes into their friendship. In the old Bermondsey days he had once tried to speak, and, like her father, had come up against a blank wall. She had been very sympathetic; Olive was always sympathetic; but she had not succeeded in finding out that his clumsy and hesitating avowal meant anything more than an assurance of his brotherly affection and interest in her work. It occurred to her that there was scarcely any need to tell her of that, seeing that she had no doubt of it; Olive had always been instinctively repelled by any forcing into speech of things which one can take for granted. Then she remembered that he had spent most of the last night in protecting a family of terrified children from the violence of a drunken father; and reflected that his work must be telling upon him, or he would not stammer and turn white for nothing. She assured him, therefore, in her soothing and even voice, that she valued and returned his friendship, and that certainly she would call him "Dick" if he preferred it; and then, in the same tone, inquired

whether he was careful to change his socks when they got wet.

He had not repeated his indiscretion. "One might as well make love to Britomart," he had said to himself, with angry and humorous despair. And, indeed, her stupidity in this matter was an impregnable fortress.

When the epidemic broke out, he had applied for a "holiday post" in the stricken town, and cheerfully exchanged with a nervous curate who was glad to get away. Hard work and the excitement of fighting the pestilence were congenial to his natural temper; but the underlying motive had been to keep near Olive while the danger lasted. Now that she had come into smooth water, he also felt the need of less strenuous work for a time. But, he told himself, he would have to be content with the joy of her presence, with the encouragement of her help, and leave her undisturbed in her magnificent and absurd pigheadedness. Short of a sledge-hammer, it seemed, nothing would make her understand that a man desired her in marriage; and if she did arrive at realizing what he meant, the chances were that she would take it either as an insult or as a sign of incipient general paralysis.

But silence in a roaring wilderness of factories and slums, in daily, hourly contact with squalid tragedy, had been an easier thing than silence between honeysuckle hedges in a Sussex June. The curate's resolution held out for three interminable weeks. Then, meeting her accidentally in the cottage of a bedridden villager, he walked with her across the

fields in a golden afternoon, talking briskly of parish details, his head turned away. /

They came to a stile where the footpaths crossed ; one, a straight white thread, running through green barley-fields, the other winding round in shadow beside a little copse. Close by, a gap in the hedge showed a glimpse into the green shade of the wood ; a mossy dell, a thicket of gnarled holly-scrub, a few tall foxgloves, stately, with drooping bells. The curate held out his hand.

“ Good-bye ; our roads part here, I suppose.”

“ Are you in a hurry ? I’m going to sit and rest a bit in the wood ; I’ve been running about all day.”

She clambered through the gap, and sat down on a felled tree at the edge of the dell. The curate stood looking at her, his hand clenched on the stile. “ If I go in there,” he thought, “ I shall make an ass of myself, and she’ll despise me for it.”

“ Must you go ?” she said absently ; “ I’m so sorry.”

She pulled a trail of flowering honeysuckle towards her, and drew the ivory blossoms across her face, shutting her eyes. The curate had still not moved. “ I shall make an ass of myself,” he thought again. “ She cares more for the scent of a bit of honeysuckle than for all the lovers under the sun.”

“ I must go,” he said hoarsely.

Her lips parted in a smile at the soft touch of the flower, and he saw that she had forgotten his existence. He turned away, setting his teeth ; then, in

quick anger, jumped through the gap and came up to her.

"Olive," he said, and pulled the spray from her hand. "Olive . . ."

She raised her head, first merely startled, then with quick sympathy.

"Dick! Why, Dick, what is it?"

The man was shaking with helpless rage.

"Let your green stuff alone for a minute! Do you think I can't see you don't care a hang for me, without your throwing it in my face like that? Oh, one might as well fall in love with the foxglove there; you're like a sexless water-spirit!"

"Dick!" she said again, and rose, laying a cool hand on his. He jerked it off.

"Look here, you needn't feel my pulse; I've not got small-pox. And I'm not off my head, either. I'm simply a poor devil of a man that's been fooling about for three years after a girl who's not human enough to know when to keep her hands off!"

He sat down suddenly, shading his face with an unsteady hand.

"I beg your pardon, Olive; I know you meant kindly, but you are so awfully dense. Any other woman would find out if she was hurting a man like that."

He picked another spray of honeysuckle, and held it out to her, biting his lip.

"I'm sorry I spoiled your flower. It wasn't manners; but, you see, it's not altogether pleasant to be dragged at the tail of Britomart's horse, or even at the apron-strings of her uniform."

She had drawn back a step, and was standing quite still, facing him. His eyes fell under her clear gaze, and the honeysuckle dropped from his fingers.

"Dick, why didn't you tell me? I never guessed. Indeed, I never guessed. Why didn't you tell me before?"

He laughed.

"I did try, my dear, two years ago; but you never even found out what I was talking about. Of course you never guessed; if you could guess things of that sort, you wouldn't be you. There's no need to look so unhappy; I know what you're going to say. You don't care about me. Well, it doesn't matter; I care enough about you to go on waiting indefinitely—twenty years, if you like—just on the chance..."

"But, Dick, there isn't any chance."

His voice dropped.

"Are you quite sure of that? Quite sure? We've been good friends always; I thought, perhaps, some day..."

"No, no!" she interrupted in distress; "it's not that!" She stood still for a moment, her eyes fixed on the ground, then sat down beside him on the tree-trunk. "You don't understand. I'd have told you before, if I'd only guessed. There's another man."

He drew in his breath with a gasp. Britomart, and another man. . . .

"Another man . . ." he repeated. "You mean you're going to marry him?"

She paused again before answering.

"We are engaged. I shan't marry anyone else."

The curate sat digging his stick into the moss. After some time he rose and said huskily :

"I'd better clear out ; good-bye."

Then he saw that Olive was in tears. The weakness was so alien to his whole conception of her that the sight of it startled him out of his self-pity.

"Don't !" he said miserably ; "don't ! I've been a selfish idiot and upset you. I . . ."

He stopped and tried for words, but found nothing better than a lame : "I wish you every happiness."

She seemed to put the thought away from her, together with her momentary failure of will.

"Happiness is scarcely the question at issue for me," she answered, and brushed the tears aside. "I am very sorry to have hurt you so ; it seems as if no one could move a step in life without hurting other people. It will hurt my father horribly ; but I can't help it."

She put one hand across her eyes. She was conscious of an immense fatigue and difficulty in finding words to explain.

"We have been engaged since last autumn. You're the first person I have told. My people will have to know some time, but I must keep it from them as long as I can. It's all so black and hopeless, and they'll never understand—never. And then mother will cry ; I can't face it yet. I have to get accustomed myself . . ."

She stared before her silently. The curate sat down again.

"Can't one do anything to help you ? What is the trouble ? You . . . care for him, don't you ?"

"Oh, it's not for want of caring! If I didn't care . . ."

She looked up.

"I wonder, will you understand? I know your Socialism is not the kind that's all talk. You see, he's a Russian. You know what that means, when a man is worth anything."

"A Russian . . ." the curate repeated blankly. Then he understood. "What, a Nihilist?"

"Nihilist, if you like. It's a ridiculous name, of course. In Russia nowadays it simply means a person who has the wrong opinions."

"And he is living here? A refugee?"

"No; he was over here for a year, taking plans of English machinery for the firm he works for in St. Petersburg. He has gone back now; and I never know . . ." She raised haunted eyes to his face. "They made no difficulty about letting him come over and go back; but he is under police supervision still. They count it a great favour to let him live in St. Petersburg at all, and they may take some fancy into their heads at any moment. It's like living over a black pit."

"But he is not actually proscribed?"

"Not now, or I shouldn't have told you about him. He has had two years in prison, and come out with diseased lungs and gray hair. He's only six years older than I am. The next imprisonment will kill him. Both lungs are affected; you know, their prisons are full of phthisis germs."

Her voice shook a little, and the sound caught the hearer by the throat. At this moment his sympathy

was quite free from any selfish grief for the loss of his own hopes.

"It's lucky that you have courage; you have chosen a hard patch to hoe," he said softly.

She shook her head.

"I have less courage than you think, and I had no choice."

"May I know his name?"

"Vladimir Damarov. He is only half Russian; there's Italian blood in him, and Danish as well."

"Damarov?" the curate repeated. "Damarov? Ah, and models of machinery. Of course."

She looked up quickly.

"Do you know him?"

"By sight, not personally. My old chum Burney—you know, Tom Burney the painter—met him somewhere in London, and went crazy to get a sketch of his head. He got a ticket for the opening of the Industrial Exhibition just to have a chance of seeing him again, and made me go with him, so that he could pretend to be talking to me while he sketched. Didn't you see the pastel he did? Ah, yes, you missed the winter shows, over the small-pox. It was one of Burney's best things. He called it: 'A Head of Lucifer.'"

They sat talking quietly, confidentially. For once in her life Olive had forgotten to be considerate, and, abandoning herself to the relief of breaking silence at last, talked of her lover and his wrongs, of his ruined health and wasted gifts, without thinking how much she might be hurting her listener. As for Dick, he ground his teeth a little once or twice when

her voice lingered unconsciously on Vladimir's name ; but the story was, indeed, such as would make a man forget to be jealous.

Vladimir Damarov, she told him, came of a class peculiar to Russia : that petty rural nobility which, after generations of idleness, found itself, on the emancipation of the serfs, suddenly confronted with the necessity of earning its bread. Starting in life with a talent for modelling and drawing and a passionate bent towards plastic art, he at first intended to become a sculptor ; but while still very young he fell under the personal influence of one Karol Slavinski, a Polish medical student, who, though but two years older than himself, was already deeply implicated in the revolutionary movement.

With this student lived his sister Wanda, a girl of twenty, a conspirator, like her brother. They belonged to one of the "doomed families" of Poland ; the families in which each successive generation contributes its share to the national martyrology. The brother and sister had not become rebels ; they had been born so. The thing was a matter of course, simply because their name was Slavinski.

Vladimir had gradually become their close friend and helper, and at twenty-two had betrothed himself to Wanda. Then, when her brother had just taken his degree in medicine, the police had swooped down and arrested all three. After two years of solitary confinement "on suspicion," Vladimir had been let out because nothing could be proved against him, and had been given to understand that he was

"very fortunate in having for friends old hands who remembered to burn their papers." Karol Slavinski, against whom a good deal had been proved, was then on his way to the Siberian convict-station of Akatui, with a sentence of four years' penal servitude. Of Wanda there was no news at all. During the first year and a half she had written home from time to time; then the letters had stopped, and her friends were unable to find out whether she was alive or dead.

Vladimir spent four months in frantic efforts to find out the truth; bribing petty officials, imploring the police, petitioning high authorities for news, and receiving only evasive or contradictory answers. Then the hushed-up story leaked out bit by bit. Wanda had been a pretty girl, and a new gaoler, appointed during her second year in the prison, had an eye for pretty girls. No actual outrage had been committed; but the girl had not dared to sleep, and her nerves had broken down under the strain of watching and nightly dread. She had succeeded, evidently with some difficulty and after several failures, in cutting her throat with a bit of glass. Since then Vladimir, with what remained to him of lungs and nerves, had earned his living by designing models of machinery, always under police supervision.

"And the girl's brother?" Dick asked.

"He was amnestied when he had served half of his sentence, and is now practising as a doctor in Russian Poland. It is considered an extraordinary example of clemency that they allowed him to come back from Siberia at all, but he has relatives in high

positions. He very seldom gets permission to visit St. Petersburg ; besides, he and Volodya are both poor, so they can't meet often ; but they are close friends."

A church clock struck the hour. Olive came back to daily life with a start.

"Six already ! I must get back to mother."

"And I shall be late for choir-practice. Your mother promised to lend us a volume of old hymn-tunes ; I will walk back with you and fetch it."

At the garden-gate they met the postman with a letter in his hand.

"For you, Miss Olive."

Her face lit up at the sight of the envelope ; and before Dick saw the double-headed eagle on the postage-stamp, he knew where the letter came from. A sudden gust of fierce resentment swept over him ; it was so hateful to think of her flinging her bright youth into this bottomless pit.

"I'll fetch the hymns," he said, and went into the house, leaving her to read her letter alone.

Coming out with the hymn-book, he walked briskly towards the gate, and passed the big chestnut-tree without stopping. Olive was standing under the tree, holding the open letter in her hand, but not reading. She made no movement at the sound of his footstep on the gravel, and he quickened his pace.

"A love-letter," he thought. "Why should I disturb her ?"

A moment later she came running after him down the road.

"Dick ! Stop ! I want to speak to you."

One glance at her face showed him that the letter had brought her bad news.

"My dear, what is it? Not . . ."

"No no, not arrested; but he's very ill. It's pleurisy. The letter is not from him; it's from a friend of his who thought I ought to know. I must go to him at once."

"To St. Petersburg?"

"Yes, to nurse him. Take a telegram to the post-office for me, will you? There's the address. Ah, no, that's in Russian; I'll write it out. Say: 'Coming first train.' You can put it in French. Father will have to get me money from the bank. I got my passport ready some time ago, in case of wanting it."

"But what help can you be out there, without the language of the country?"

"I know a little of the language; I've been learning it for some time. I must go in and explain to father. . . ."

"What, everything?"

"No, nothing of all that; I can't tell them about it now. Only that I'm called to Russia to nurse a friend, and that I must go at once. There's the address for the telegram. Good-bye, dear Dick; I must go in."

"It's not good-bye; I'll look up trains, and run in at nine this evening to see what I can do about luggage and so on. I'm a good hand at packing, you know. I . . ."

He caught hold of her hand, kissed it suddenly, and went away without finishing the sentence,

CHAPTER III

OLIVE got out of the train on to a crowded platform. Her first impressions were of stifling heat, a faint, sickly smell, a crowd of men running about and obeying unintelligible orders, and the dominating presence of a stolid figure in blue.

As she stood practising her carefully-learned Russian phrases upon porters who all talked together, a deep chest voice behind her asked : " Miss Latham ?"

A big man with a tawny beard was holding out a hand to her.

" I am Dr. Slavinski. Volodya asked me to meet you. May I have your luggage-ticket ?"

She waited till they drove away from the station to ask :

" How is Volodya ?"

" Rather a high temperature to-day ; but that may be excitement because you are coming. It's a fairly bad attack, but I've seen him worse."

" Have you had a nurse ?"

" Yes ; but he disliked her, and I dismissed her yesterday. I am glad you have come."

" I didn't know you were in St. Petersburg."

"I came yesterday ; I couldn't get a pass before. Luckily I have an uncle who is a big official in the Ministry of Roads and Railways here, and he gets me a few days' permit every now and then."

"You live in one of the Polish factory towns, don't you ?"

"I was living in Lodz till a few months ago ; but they turned me out as a suspect, because the Socialist movement is so strong there. Lately I've been kicking about the world again, more or less."

He spoke English fluently, though with a strong foreign accent, and with the lazy sing-song inflection that marks the Lithuanian. He was evidently a conservative person, for the years that he had spent, at various periods of his life, in "kicking about the world," had not cured him of the Polish trick of accentuating his words on the penultimate syllable.

"I don't think there is immediate danger," he added presently ; "but he will need very careful nursing for some time. He had been getting badly run down before the pleurisy began."

They talked for a few minutes of the patient's symptoms.

"How did he get it ?"

"Catching a chill, as usual. It is difficult to avoid in this climate ; and he is careless, especially when these fits of depression come on."

"Is he depressed ? I mean, more depressed than usual ?"

"Yes, and going back over dead things that are better forgotten. That's why you can be of so much help if you have steady nerves ; you belong

to his future, not his past. You don't lose your head easily, do you?"

"I never have done yet. I might, if there were sufficient cause."

Dr. Slavinski fixed his eyes on the broad back of the driver, which shut out the view in front. After a moment, he said :

"You have come into a country where one is never safe from sufficient cause. Anything may happen at any moment. It is not likely, but it is always possible. Try to remember that Volodya's one chance of ever having decent health or nerves again depends on you. There's one thing more I want to say to you. In this country you are always liable to come across ugly things. Whatever you may see, don't cry, and don't lose your temper. It never does any good here."

"I don't remember crying more than twice since I was a child, and I very seldom lose my temper."

He looked her over gravely at that. She, absorbed in her lover and his symptoms, had all this time thought of the man beside her only in his capacity of doctor ; but now she became suddenly conscious that the big creature was taking her measure in a critical, observant way which might have been embarrassing but that it was so impersonal.

"That is good," he said, slowly withdrawing the examining gaze. "And don't get frightened without cause. I will let you know honestly if I think there is any real ground for anxiety."

"You mean, about his health?"

"About that or anything else."

Reaching the house, they found the patient in a state of feverish excitement, with dangerously bright eyes and a hectic spot on each cheek. Olive's trained eyes saw at a glance that he was in pain and savagely trying to hide it.

He persisted in assuring her, in a weak, strained voice, that he had never felt better in his life, and that his whole illness was "one of old Karol's cranks."

"You know, a man doesn't get a chance to say his soul is his own where Karol is; one might as well argue with a steam-roller. I was beginning to think I should never hear of him again, so I wrote and said I was dying, and yesterday morning he turns up, more like a bear than ever. Now, of course, he's going to hold me to it. But for you to come all this way! You'll have to learn not to take me and my lungs too seriously—won't she, Karol?"

Olive looked round. Karol had slipped silently out of the room and shut the door without a sound, leaving them alone together. Vladimir seized her hands, dragged her to him, and began to kiss her violently, murmuring broken, passionate phrases. She drew herself away.

"Listen, Volodya; if you get excited I shall go away. I'll sit by you if you won't talk; and if your chest is hurting you much you may have another poultice."

"Nothing hurts me, sweetheart, when I have

you to look at ; but I may as well have the poultice, all the same."

She gave him what physical relief she could, and then sat still, her hand in his. He lay with compressed lips, and hands tightly clenched on hers ; he was evidently suffering acutely. After a little while he began to talk again, hurriedly, confusedly, asking interminable questions, and running on without waiting to have them answered. His temperature was rising, and he was beginning to wander. She released her hand gently, and went out of the room to look for Karol.

She found him reading a medical book in the little sitting-room, with his long legs tucked away under the table, and one hand thrust into a tow-coloured thatch of hair. He was really not very much bigger than other people ; but the slow deliberateness of his movements, together with a certain massive set of head and shoulders, made him look, at times, preposterously large. His whole appearance was in such striking contrast to the high-strung, neurotic, over-refined physical type which she had associated with the Poles, that she noticed it even in the midst of her anxiety. " Like a Norse god, a little unfinished," she thought.

" Ah," he said, looking up ; " I was just going to call you to supper. It is nearly ready."

" Will you come and look at Volodya, please ; I think he ought to have a sedative."

When at last they had got the sick man to sleep, Karol took her into the next room, laid the table, and made her bed while she ate.

"I sit up to-night," he said; "and you to-morrow. The maid sleeps out, but the porter's wife is on the ground-floor. She's a kindly woman, and worships Volodya because he was good to her child when it was ill last year. She'll do anything for you. The maid comes at eight and gets breakfast ready."

She soon slipped into a daily routine of nursing. The actual attack was over in a few days, but it left the patient so weak and exhausted that great care was needed for some time. Karol stayed with them only four days; he was a man on whose shoulders many responsibilities rested, and it had been a matter of great difficulty for him to come at all. She was anxious to get her patient out of the hot, unhealthy town as soon as possible, but Karol advised her not to let him travel for three weeks, as the journey would be a very fatiguing one.

It had been arranged that he should go to his country home, a dilapidated manor-house in the wild and lonely lake district where the Volga rises. His two brothers, one a widower with children, the other a bachelor, lived there with an elderly maiden aunt. The aunt had written to Olive, begging her to come with him and give the family an opportunity of meeting her before she returned to England, and she had accepted the invitation in laboriously traced Russian characters. Karol also had promised to spend a summer holiday with them.

Towards the end of July she left town with the convalescent patient. He bore the train journey well; but three days of jolting in a springless cart over impossible roads through forest and swamp

and heathy scrub, and two nights in an improvised hammock in filthy "post-stations" cost him nearly all the little strength that he had regained. Every now and then they would pass a wretched village, pestilent and hunger-bitten, where stunted beggars, clustering round with outstretched hands, assailed their ears with a long, monotonous whine, and where the only prosperous creatures seemed the priests, the drink-shop keepers, and the swarming vermin. Then the wilderness would close round again.

Karol met them at a little town half-way, and they finished the journey together. On the third evening they came to a desolate lake between deep pine-woods. Flocks of startled wild-duck rose from the lily leaves as they passed, and Vladimir's haggard face lit up at the whirring of their wings.

"Our lake; you'll see the house presently. I told you we were rich in game and water-lilies, if in nothing else."

"And lilies of the valley in their season, surely, from the acres of leaves we have passed."

"Yes, nightingales and wild flowers are all our treasures here, except the trees."

His eyes turned lovingly to the black belt of forest.

"I wouldn't be too modest," Karol put in with his lazy drawl. "Don't forget the wolves, and bears, and snakes."

"Are there many snakes?" Olive asked. Karol shrugged his shoulders.

"Any amount, including the money-lenders and drink-shop keepers. There's also great wealth of

criminals, and idiots, and mosquitoes, and ague, and vermin, and unmentionable diseases. Quite a lot to choose from."

Vladimir fired up at once. In defence of this beloved and inhospitable wilderness he was ready to quarrel even with his dearest friend. This was, indeed, an old cause of dispute. To Karol's practical nature such wasting of land and timber and human life was a personal annoyance. The natural beauties of the country were spoilt to him by an aching impatience to see the marshes drained, the forests thinned and regulated, and decent roads made between the villages; but Vladimir, though he might agree theoretically, would in his heart have resented the lopping of a single tree.

The district was cursed alike by nature and by men; frozen for half the year, malarious the other half, neglected, chronically famine-stricken, infested by beasts of prey. For a hundred years the peasants had been hemmed into their desert by the enormous and permanent military camp stationed along the western border. Generations of vice and slavery had poisoned them, body and soul; and emancipation, to them, meant only that they were now plundered and ill-used by officials and money-lenders instead of by land-owners and overseers. The rest of the scanty population consisted of a sprinkling of low-class Jews, the refuse of the Ghettos, an occasional Tartar pedlar, gipsy horse-dealer, or sharp-eyed German "sweater," and a few degenerate families of petty nobility. These last, ruined in character by the long habit of owning

serfs, in pocket by losing them, lingered on in helpless and penurious idleness, as wretched as their former slaves and almost as ignorant.

Nevertheless, in Vladimir's eyes this was the fairest spot on earth. It was bound up with all the little hope and happiness that he had ever known. Here he had grown from childhood, dreaming golden dreams of a sculptor's life ; here, shyly in secret, before the black years came, he had tried his hand at modelling. Now there were other secrets and other dreams ; but he still loved the place with a hot and jealous passion. Everything here was beautiful to him : the echoing distance in deep woods ; the untrodden tangle of the alder-swamp, golden with iris, blue with forget-me-not ; the virginal robe of snow in winter, of lilies in spring ; the ghostly mist-wreaths over lake and fen ; the sunsets, red between red pine-trunks. Even the most unfriendly aspects of nature : frost and ague and deadly mire-holes, hidden under treacherous bog-grass ; the circling of great hawks by day, the howl of many wolves by night ; to him, all had their part in the menacing and mournful splendour of this pitiless land.

The two friends were still disagreeing when a turn of the road brought them to the end of the lake and to a hill rising sharply above it. An avenue of great lime-trees, thick with blossom, led up from the water's edge to the manor-house on the top. Low and rambling, roughly built of split tree-trunks and dried moss, the porch awry, the balcony falling into ruin, the house yet retained, in its

slovenly and poverty-stricken decay, a shabby pretentiousness, an indolent gentility. It seemed to spread itself out scornfully above the starved village huddled by the lake-shore, proclaiming that the men who had lived here in the old serf-owning days, though they went unwashed for weeks together, and ignored the commonest decencies of life, had been too fine to do for themselves any simple office which they could flog or terrify some wretched slave into doing for them. Around and behind the main building were grouped the humbler dependencies which had ministered to its tawdry dignity : the huge servants' quarters (there had been many servants), the kitchens, the bath-house, the bake-house, the ice-house; and the stables, carefully placed a little way off, that the cries of serfs under punishment there might not disturb the ladies of the house. The same consideration for the ladies had put a screen of trees round a small separate dwelling-house a few paces beyond the stables. This building, which had now been set apart for Vladimir and Karol, was the "pavilion," where each successive serf-owner had been wont to instal the favourite mistress of the moment. She, not being a lady, would, of course, have no fanciful delicacy about the sound of shrieks and moans. Here the girl, in prosperous times perhaps a little French dressmaker or German circus-rider brought from town, more often the wife or daughter of some cowed and acquiescent villager, would lounge away her youth in dreary idleness, eating cheap sweets and growing fat. Then, when the

first gray hairs showed, or some new fancy caught the master's eyes, she would be turned out of doors, if a stranger, to beg her way back to town ; if native born and his property, she would drift into the filthy servants' quarters to wear out the rest of her life as a household drudge, under the lash of her lady's tongue ; and, perhaps, if she did not bear her changed fortunes meekly, would come, in her turn, to the stables.

Karol pointed out the various buildings to Olive, explaining their original uses. He was walking up the hill to relieve the horses, and she also had insisted on getting out. She listened in silence ; the cart was close beside them, and she could see the sick man's brilliant eyes glow and soften at the sight of now one familiar tree-trunk and now another. She was wondering, as she watched the vivid, passionate face, by what cruel irony of chance a man who could feel so keenly had been born inheritor of all this stagnant rottenness.

The spinster aunt was waiting for them on the balcony steps, surrounded by the five children, whose father and uncle had not yet returned from the day's work on the farm. She was a kindly soul, not overburdened with intelligence, much addicted to religious exercises and the making of jam, and devotedly attached to Vladimir, though always a little afraid of him. In the bottom of her heart she nourished a bitter grudge against the "clever town friends," without whom, she firmly believed, her darling Volodya would never have "got into trouble." Governments were in her

eyes inconvenient creatures, which, like wolves and mosquitoes, should be endured as patiently as may be, seeing that it has pleased Providence to create them. Of course, they make themselves unpleasant, that being their nature ; but it is sinful to grumble, and to kick only makes things worse. She had explained all this defiantly to Karol on the occasion of his first visit to Lyesnoye ; and when, to her amazement, he had gently and seriously agreed with every word, she had kissed him on both cheeks, and, ignoring the fact that he was a Pole, and therefore a Papist infidel, had made the sign of the cross over him in orthodox Russian fashion. Since then he had become, in his individual capacity, as dear to her as her own nephews, though she still continued to object to him in his quality of a clever town friend.

Against Olive all her prejudices were ranged erect like a porcupine's quills. That the girl was Vladimir's betrothed, an interloper stealing his heart away from his own kin, would have been offence enough. But she was also a foreigner, an infidel, probably a student. "Student," the most opprobrious word in Aunt Sonya's vocabulary, was in her mouth a general term for persons who read incomprehensible books, get into difficulties with the police, and omit to cross themselves in a thunderstorm. Worst of all, Olive was English. Aunt Sonya, whose experience of the world outside Lyesnoye was limited to two holidays in Moscow and one in St. Petersburg, had never seen an English person in her life, and her ideas of England

and the English were based on Anglophobe articles in the Russian daily press. She had tried hard to form a mental picture of the girl beforehand ; but it oscillated quaintly between the dangerous siren, entrapper and destroyer of unsuspecting men, of whom she had read in foolish novels, the " shock-headed female Nihilist " so persistently abused by the reactionary papers, and the spectacled, carrotty-haired, ogre-mouthed Englishwoman of popular caricature.

She received the intruder with an icily ceremonious bow which caused much secret amusement to the onlookers, but quite failed to impress Olive, who went placidly to change her dress, merely supposing that the old lady was shy with strangers. A little later in the evening, when the two big brothers had come in and the children were asleep, Aunt Sonya's flow of eager talk was cut short by a gently decisive : " It is time for you to go to bed now, Volodya."

" What, before supper ?" cried the old lady ; " but I've scarcely seen him, and the boys have only just come in ; he can't go yet."

" I'm sorry," Olive replied in her broken Russian ; " but I have Dr. Slavinski's orders."

It seemed not to occur to her that anyone could question her authority. They all submitted, of course, and looked on helplessly, while she arranged her patient's room, put aside as unsuitable the food which they had prepared for him, and made him eat what she brought in.

" Now he had better be quiet," she said, and they went meekly out of the room.

Karol, meanwhile, was smoking on the balcony of the main building. He was free to enjoy the sight and scent of lime-blossom, knowing that there was no need for him to come in ; Olive could be trusted to carry out his instructions in the teeth of any number of excited aunts and brothers.

"She's very . . . masterful, isn't she?" said the old lady, coming out to him with an anxious pucker between her brows. "But she's quiet about it. Do you think she'll make Volodya happy? The good God owes him a little bit of happiness, though perhaps it's a sin to say it. . . ." She crossed herself, sighing.

Karol slowly took the cigarette from his mouth and blew away a cloud of smoke.

"The girl's all right," he said, in his deep and leisurely tones. "I wouldn't worry my head about it, auntie ; she's a decent girl enough."

This, from Karol, was high praise, and the old lady felt comforted. She sat with him, listening to the murmur of the branches, till Olive's voice said behind them :

"Dr. Slavinski, Volodya would like to speak to you."

Karol rose and went in. Aunt Sonya, looking up, saw the girl standing beside her, tranquil and grave, the lamplight from the window falling on her face and hair.

"My dear," the old lady began timidly, and broke off. Olive turned her head.

"Are you cold? Can I get you a shawl?"

Aunt Sonya hesitated. She felt herself baffled, and could not understand why.

"No," she said, rising; "I'll go in now. Oh, you are very kind, I'm sure."

She bowed stiffly as Olive opened the glass door for her; then, with a sudden impulse, reached up on tiptoe, and kissed the tall girl's cheek.

Karol, coming out a few minutes later, found Olive alone on the balcony, her eyes fixed on the dark mass of the lime-trees. It was a long time before he spoke.

"All the same, you need not be so anxious," he said, continuing a conversation which had not been begun. "It's only that the journey has pulled him down a bit. And as for all the corruption and beastliness that he has come out of, it just shows what he was made of to come out."

The girl's strained face relaxed. She was growing accustomed to Karol's way of guessing and answering her thoughts; and found it, in this new and perplexing world, a relief to have someone understand her when she could not understand herself.

CHAPTER IV

"VOLODYA! Vladimir! Volodya, aa . . . u-u-u . . .!"

The old peasant, sitting with his old wife plaiting bast shoes by the lake-shore, looked up with bleared eyes.

"Vladimir Ivanych is in the pavilion with his mud stuff and a dead bird."

"A dead bird?"

"Yes, little mother; one of those big buzzard-hawks. Piotr Ivanych shot it to get the tail-feathers for the foreign lady's hat; but she wouldn't have it; said she didn't like to see wild things killed. Seems it's the fashion in town nowadays for the quality to be tender-hearted. So Vladimir Ivanych carried it off to the pavilion. He's been there all to-day and yesterday making a mud image of it."

Aunt Sonya, picking her way across the marshy ground at the water's edge, reached a path running up the side of the hill to the "pavilion," now Vladimir's special domain. The old man looked after her with lazy scorn as she toiled up the hill.

"Yes, yes," he muttered over his bast-plaiting.
"The quality! Soiling their white hands with mud,

and running their own errands, and trapesing about on foot to nurse the sick. Times are changed, little mother, since we were young." He laughed, and turned to his wife with an ugly look.

"Nursing the sick, eh, Parasha? And who knows what sort of stuff she gives them, the English witch?"

The old woman nodded her head. He went on:

"There's been a lot of sickness lately at Borod-yevka. The English devil and that foreign doctor fellow have been round there, telling the people a heap of lies; saying the children die because the cowsheds are too close to the well, and the muck-heap washes down when it rains—a likely story!"

"I doubt it's they that have poisoned the well."

"Or laid a curse on the children. Who knows, with infidels like that? They haven't even a cross on their necks."

The wife began to laugh.

"And who knows what they do, she and her doctor fellow, when they get into the woods alone? Why, I've seen the brazen jade rowing on the lake with nothing over her hair!"

"And that carrion scarecrow up there making his heathen mud images and thinking she cares about him. Oho! the quality and their fancies!"

The two sat laughing together over their joke.

The pavilion stood a little higher than the other buildings. The screen of trees shut it out on three sides, but it was open to the south, and commanded a beautiful view over forest and lake. The door was wide open, and Aunt Sonya paused on the threshold,

looking in. Vladimir, in the loose scarlet shirt and leather belt of the country, was standing by a rough wooden bench, modelling in clay. The dead hawk lay on a table before him, its great wings outstretched. The splendid vigour of the unfinished work made no impression on Aunt Sonya ; she had seen her nephew's modelling before, and only regretted that his favourite recreation should be "such a messy one." Since Karol, the peacemaker, had suggested to her that, after all, drink or cards would have been worse, she had become more reconciled to the clay ; gentlemen always have their fancies, and if the hobbies are cheap and inoffensive, one should be thankful.

Her shadow fell across the bench, and he looked up.

"Why, auntie !"

"My dear, I wish you would not stand in such a draught. You'll catch another chill."

"I like the air, auntie, and the view, especially on a day like this."

He wiped the clay from his hands, and sat down on the window-sill, looking out at the cloud-shadows flitting across the lake.

"Has Olive come in yet ?" he asked.

"No ; she's been the whole day in the village with a bad case."

"Is Karol with her ?"

"Yes ; he was fetched early, and sent up after breakfast to ask her to come down and help him. They never even came in to dinner ; they're not getting much of a holiday, either of them."

"No, but they're both well and strong, and they love the work. I'm not anxious, however much she does, so long as Karol is here ; but I don't quite like the idea of her going on with it alone after he leaves us. The people suspect her of black magic already ; it might be awkward for her if anything went wrong."

Aunt Sonya settled herself more comfortably in the big chair. She had come up to enjoy an hour's quiet chat with her favourite nephew ; and, of course, the idea that she was interrupting him at a critical moment of his work never crossed her mind. He washed his hands, laid a wet cloth over the clay, and sat down again, smiling to hide the aching disappointment that it would have been unkind to let her see. If he could have had one more half-hour undisturbed, he might have got that difficult curve of the left wing.

"Well, auntie," he said brightly ; "and what news have you got to tell me ? I haven't seen you since breakfast."

"No, indeed, going off with a bit of bread and cheese in your pocket like a tramp and never coming in to dinner ! I don't get much company out of having you all here ; one messing about with clay the whole day long, and the others with sick people. And I'd made a pie, the kind you like, with mushrooms."

"Never mind ; we'll have the pie cold. And now tell me about the roan mare. Has that gipsy fellow been round again to-day ?"

"Yes ; he says her leg will never be sound again ;

but Petya thinks that's only because he wants to buy her cheap."

"To sell at the Smolensk horse-fair, no doubt."

"Yes, he's been collecting cattle round the villages. By the way, he's just come from Gvozdyevka; it was the rat-poison that killed the old beggar-man."

"Karol thought so from the first; directly he heard about the symptoms he said: 'That's strychnine.' But what made Akulina do it? Had she a grudge against the old fellow? Beggars are not worth robbing."

"She'd never seen him before. She's confessed everything now. It was Mitya that gave her the poison, to kill his wife with. He bought it from that Tartar pedlar, Akhmetka."

"Mitya who?"

"Red-headed Mitya, down in the village here. He wanted to get rid of his wife, you see, because she was always so ill after the babies were born, and couldn't milk the cows; but he didn't care to take the risk himself, so he gave Akulina the rat-poison, and promised to marry her if she did it."

"But what had the beggar to do with Mitya's wives?"

"Nothing; he just came along the road and asked for a drink, so she tried the stuff on him to see if it was real poison. She says: Tartars always cheat you if they can, and how's a poor woman to know she's got the right stuff if she doesn't try?"

"Well, that's sound argument," said Karol, coming in with Olive and sitting down lazily on the edge of the table. "Auntie, I told that squint-eyed

girl—what's her name—Theophylacta?—to bring the tea here. Miss Latham is tired out, and it's time Volodya left off working."

Olive sat down on the wooden bench beside the door, resting her chin on one hand. She was evidently very tired, and her face looked older and thinner than a few weeks ago. Aunt Sonya jumped up at once in her bustling, good-natured way.

"My dear, how pale you are! And you've had nothing to eat all day; you must be starving. When did you get back?"

"Just now; we went in to change our clothes, and came straight on here. It's all right; I'm only tired."

The old lady stroked the white cheek affectionately, and went off to direct Theophylacta. Her easy nature had already formed a new attachment. The English in general remained foreign devils, but Olive was a privileged exception, to be petted in spite of her objectionable nationality, just as Karol was petted in spite of his.

Karol pulled a book out of his pocket, and began to read. Vladimir stooped down over the girl, and pushed back the hair from her forehead. He had the sensitive finger-tips that can touch without wounding, and the little contraction of her eyebrows smoothed itself away. For so well-balanced a person she was peculiarly easily distressed by the wrong touch, and it had been a real effort to her not to wince under the old lady's podgy hand.

"Don't weary yourself so, little girl," he said in his caressing broken English. "What have you been so desperately busy over all day?"

Her face darkened again.

"Helping Dr. Slavinski to commit a crime."

"Yes," Karol assented, without looking up from his book. "That's true enough, if you come to think of it. But you'd do it again."

"That makes it all the worse," she retorted gloomily.

Vladimir looked from one to the other.

"Saving an undesirable life?"

"Two lives," she said in the same hard way, her eyes fixed on the lake. "A mother that would be better dead, and a child that ought never to have been born. Of course, I should do it again, Dr. Slavinski, just as you would; but it's a sin and a shame to keep such people alive, and you know it as well as I do."

Karol put down his book. He had become very grave, and in this mood was more unapproachable than ever.

"No," he said. "I thought I knew it when I was your age. Now I know that I know nothing; and I plod on and do what I can in the dark. You start with fine theories, like the rest of us; but you'll come to that in time."

She made a quick gesture of protest. But Karol had gone back to his book, and was again a merely negative presence.

"But, Olive," Vladimir said at last; "you must have seen discouraging sights in the London slums too. Why . . .?"

She broke in vehemently.

"Discouraging sights! Oh, one sees enough of

them everywhere. But here one sees nothing else—nothing at all. Volodya, in all that village there's not one sound man or woman or child. The people are rotting alive, body and soul. That cottage where we've been all day—there are ten persons in it, four generations. From the great-grandfather to the baby born to-day they ought to be chloroformed, every one. They're diseased to the marrow of their bones: the father a drunkard, the aunt an idiot, the grandmother . . . oh, I can't describe it. And the talk!"

She stopped with a shiver of disgust.

"I waited outside," she went on; "till Dr. Slavinski wanted me. The grandmother and a neighbour sat down by me, and began talking about that poisoning case at the other village. All they could see in it was that the Commune was very stupid not to have closed with the offer of the police to hush the matter up for twelve kopecks a head. They said that when there was a corpse found in the flooded meadow last year the Borodyevka people paid seven kopecks each, and that one expects to pay a little extra in summer. It's like a bad dream to hear them talk."

"The rate on corpses is always higher at harvest time," Karol put in placidly, over his book. "But the Gvozdyevka people struck because the police ran it up too much. They said they wouldn't pay more than ten. You see, they have to draw the line somewhere, or there'd be nothing left for the tax-gatherer. Ah, there's the tea. That girl will do herself an injury; the tray's too heavy."

He jumped up with a quickness surprising in so big and lazy a man, and ran, rather awkwardly, down the slope to carry the tray up for the maid-servant. Vladimir stood still beside Olive, his hand on her shoulder.

"Dear," he said; "I did warn you at the beginning. It's no light matter to have a lover who lives in hell. You have seen only a very little glimpse of it yet."

She turned quickly, and put her cheek against his hand. She was so reserved and shy, and a caress from her was so rare a thing, that the man changed colour and trembled at its suddenness. An instant later she released herself, and sat up stiffly.

"What about your modelling? May I see it yet?"

He took off the cloth. When Karol came in with the tea-tray, she was standing silently before the rough clay image. He came and stood beside her, silent too.

"I didn't know you could do cruel things like that," she said, raising troubled eyes to her lover's face.

"I did," said Karol. "It's a bit brutal, Volodya, but it's strong enough."

"It's cruel," the girl persisted. "It's battle, murder, and sudden death. The thing has wanted to live, it has been willing to fight for its life, and it's not been given a fair chance."

Vladimir burst out laughing. It was fortunate that he seldom laughed, for the sound was not a pleasant one to hear.

"Well, that's a common grievance, anyway. Auntie, come and sit here. I'll clear my rubbish off the table, and we'll have tea."

That night they sat late on the balcony by moonlight. The weather was unusually clear and warm, and, though summer was waning and the nightingales had gone, soft, intermittent bird voices called and twittered in the sleeping woods. It was the last evening of Karol's visit; he was to start for Warsaw in the morning. Olive, though still looking a little tired after her long day's work, assured them she was quite rested now; she had been lying down in her room while Karol and Vladimir played with the children.

In her heart she would have been glad if, without seeming ungracious, she could have stayed quietly by herself till bedtime; the evenings in the drawing-room at Lyesnoye were always trying to her. Aunt Sonya, tactless and affectionate, could be trusted to get upon the nerves of any overwrought person; and Vladimir in particular, being the creature she loved best in the world, had often a good deal to put up with. It set Olive's teeth on edge to watch him struggling not to show impatience under the maddening dribble of questions and comment and chubbily maternal caresses. But the brothers were worse.

The youngest of the family, Vanya, though not actually an idiot, was certainly more or less feeble-minded. He had not intellect enough to be of any real use on the farm, otherwise than as an unskilled labourer, but, on the whole, he did contentedly the

only work of which he was capable, and did it fairly well. From time to time, however, he would succumb to the temptation to take more drink than his weak head could stand; and whenever that happened, the serf-owning ancestors would come to life in him. On each of these occasions he discovered anew that it was derogatory to his dignity to soil his hands with manual labour, and that the duty of a nobleman is to uphold the power of the State, to enforce respect for God and the Emperor, and to "improve the race": that is, debauch the peasant girls. He seldom aired these theories in the manor-house, having found by experience that it was unwise to do so. Petya, his eldest brother, had once caught him teaching a young dairymaid that submission to the will of her betters is a peasant girl's first duty, and had promptly seized him by the coat-collar and thrashed him with a riding-whip. Since then he had been more careful.

Once in a way, however, he would give Aunt Sonya the benefit of his aristocratic opinions. She, poor soul, remembering the days of her youth and the brutal scenes when her father used to get drunk, would sigh and cross herself as her mother had done fifty years ago, and say, tearfully, as her mother had said: "Vanya, how can you! Christ be with you, Vanya! Go to bed, my dove; you'll feel better to-morrow." Sometimes there was considerable difficulty in getting him to bed, but once there, he would sleep off the effects of the drink, and next day would go about his work as usual, though with a short temper and a sullen face. After two or three

days the old smiling, vacuous, heavily good-natured Vanya would reappear.

This summer he was on his best behaviour. His affection for Vladimir, the affection of a mongrel cur for a kind master, was the strongest influence for good which his stunted nature knew. Vladimir, to his dim mind, represented an embodied and visible conscience; and the mere phrase: "Volodya won't be pleased with you," would sometimes keep him from drink and debauchery when all else had failed. The keenest sorrow he had ever known was that Vladimir had once been angry with him. His offence on that solitary and terrible occasion had been cruelty to a horse; and ever since, even when drunk, he was always kind to animals.

With Olive he was timidly respectful, admiring from afar the favoured woman who had been found worthy of his idol's choice, but with a savage jealousy against both her and Karol brooding underneath.

The widower, Petya, was of a different stamp. When studying natural science at the University of Moscow he had shown promise of a brilliant future; but poverty and an early marriage had forced him to give up his chances of a scientific career, and return to the mortgaged, neglected, impoverished family estate to make it yield bread for a growing family. The death of his wife, to whom he had been deeply attached, and the tragedy of his brother's youth, had broken the mainspring of his character, and the hereditary curse of gentility in a land of slaves had done the rest. In a wider world other influences might have counteracted the fatal lack of will-

power ; but at Lyesnoye, though he worked from dawn to dusk, and denied himself the simplest comforts, he remained inevitably one of the "quality," and the dry-rot of the quality had eaten him up. At thirty-five he was an utter wreck, an inveterate and hopeless gambler.

Once in a few months, when by long toil and the endurance of many privations he had scraped together a little money, he would borrow a raw-boned hack from the Jew moneylender who kept the village drink-shop, and slink off to the nearest wretched town, with some lie in his mouth of cattle to sell or samples of grain to examine. The falsehoods deceived neither himself nor others ; the hired horse was proof enough. He knew, as everyone in the village knew, that if he went into town on a horse which was his to lose he would come back on foot. Then in a dirty tavern, poisoned by the reek of cheap spirits and flaring paraffin-lamps and the foul, thin, acrid stench of cockroaches and bugs, he, at other times fastidiously clean in all his habits and tastes, would sit with the captain of gendarmerie and the drunken forest inspector, and gamble, night after night, the whole night through. He had no relish for their filthy talk and filthier vices ; he was a chaste man and a proud one, and in his sober senses would have gone hungry rather than eat at the same table with a gendarme. Yet when the gambling lust possessed him he would clink glasses with them, pretending to laugh at their vilest anecdotes, lest they should take offence and refuse to play. When the last coin was gone, he would mount the starved

horse in silence, and ride the thirty miles home through dark, unfriendly woods, his head sunk on his breast, the sighing of the pines in his ears, his thoughts bitter with shame and black with shadows of suicide.

Olive had not seen him in that state. The presence of Vladimir, the only person in the world whom he still loved and respected, had kept him from the cards this summer; but the craving was strong upon him, and he grew more silent, more gloomily restless with every day.

The dreadful thing was his facial resemblance to Vladimir. The likeness was especially strong in profile, and when he sat beside Olive, as now on the balcony, the sight of this weak and pitiful replica of her lover's head made the girl sick at heart. It was the same face degraded; its stern self-repression lost, its tragedy dwindled into mere bitterness, its stoic patience frittered all away. Sometimes she would turn from it for relief even to the large, contented, foolish face of Vanya.

"Miss Latham," said Karol, rising as the clock struck eleven; "I'm going for a row. Will you come with me? You wanted to see the lake by moonlight. No, not you, Volodya; I'll come into your room and have a talk with you afterwards. The lake won't do for you to-night, there's mist over the water."

"But, my dear," cried Aunt Sonya; "you're not going on the water at this hour? And Olive too? Why, you'll catch your deaths of cold, and very likely get drowned."

She secretly thought it outrageously improper for a young girl to go boating at night alone with an unmarried man ; but she had been cured of saying such things, though not of thinking them. Sex attractions and sex restrictions, in her eyes, made up the sum of normal feminine youth ; she contemplated with timid amazement the grave unconsciousness, the stern self-respect, which replaced, in this girl's life, her code of demure and sniggering "propriety."

"I never catch cold," said Olive, putting up her needlework.

"And Karol never gets drowned," Petya added. "It's not in his destiny, so you can set your mind at rest, auntie."

They all laughed as if the joke had been quite a cheerful one ; Olive alone winced a little. She had scant sense of humour, and could not find anything funny in such pleasantries.

She and Karol walked down the lime avenue together. The moon was full in a clear sky, but under the roof of branches it was dark. The man's tall figure moved beside her, a towering shadow.

"I'm afraid you're going to have a bad time," he said, after walking for some minutes in silence. "You have a trick of taking things seriously, and that doesn't do here, unless you're going to take them very seriously indeed."

"How seriously do you take things ? For instance, your own chances of, let us say, not getting drowned ?"

"Sufficiently seriously to have given up troubling

my head about the whole question years ago. What matters to me nowadays is not which particular way I may happen to get out of life, but what sort of things I succeed in doing while I'm in it. Be careful ; that hole will catch your foot. You had better take my arm, I think."

She obeyed, and they walked to the bottom of the avenue without further speech.

"And Volodya?" she said. "Do you . . . trouble your head about what he is likely to succeed in doing before he goes under?"

She had a curious impression of a momentary stiffening of the arm she held, but the movement, if not a mere fancy of hers, was very slight. Coming out into the moonlight the next instant, she glanced at his face, and noticed resentfully that it was quite unchanged.

"You have not answered my question," she said, and drew her arm away.

He walked down to the water's edge, and loosed the boat from its moorings.

"Will you get in?"

She entered the boat without touching his proffered hand, and sat down, looking away from him. He took the sculls and put off from the shore.

"What's the use of asking questions like that?" he said at last, pausing to lean on the sculls. "We all do what we can, and go under when we must."

"I asked you," she said, her voice quivering with anger; "because I have been wondering lately whether you have ever once thought what you did

by dragging him into your politics when he was scarcely more than a boy."

He answered very gravely :

"I thought of it, at one time in my life, more often than was reasonable. Then I grew up, and left off. As a man goes on, he has other things to think about."

"Things more important than a human life that you may have happened to ruin in passing?"

"Things more important than any one life."

She flashed a wrathful glance at him.

"Where did you learn such an Olympian certainty as to which things are the most important?"

"At Akatui."

It seemed to her suddenly that she had been monstrously, unpardonably cruel. She sat silent, appalled at the riddle of these people's lives and at the constant risk she ran, groping her way blindfold among them, of striking her ignorant hand against a wound.

He dipped the sculls again, and the boat moved on slowly. For some time there was no sound but the swishing of lily-leaves against the bows and the sleepy clucking of half-waked water-fowl. A long wreath of mist, silver in the moonlight, trailed towards them across the shining surface of the lake. Among dark, motionless pines a hunting owl swept past on broad wings.

"It's no use raking up things that are past and done with," Karol said, when a raucous shriek from the owl broke in upon the silence. "Volodya's life was settled long ago ; and if you want to spare his

nerves and your own, you had better accept the facts, and make the best of them. He is over thirty, and his career is chosen."

"Who chose it? He or you?"

She put the question defiantly, with a sharp resentment against herself for having let the word "Akutui" turn her from a just quarrel. The slow, scrutinizing gaze fixed upon her face made her eyes fall.

"Have you ever asked him?"

He had baffled her again.

"I asked him once how he had come to . . . to take the first step. I understand, of course, when a man has once gone in, and things have happened, he doesn't give it up; that's different. But to enter on a thing like that, a thing so foreign to his nature, and give up all his chances of studying art . . . I couldn't understand."

"And he told you?"

"He told me that, in this and other things, he owes more to you than to anyone on earth. He said that he had sat in darkness and you had shown him a great light. Oh, he's faithful enough to you and all the things you stand for to him. It's only I that have begun to wonder, since I came here, whether the light is worth the price he has paid for it."

"The light is worth any price."

"Even a light that has gone out?"

The long-drawn, heart-rending howl of a wolf rang through the quiet air. Then came the sobbing cry of some small, hurt creature.

"You frighten yourself with dreams, like a child,"

he said, with stern compassion. "Our light doesn't go out."

Olive leaned sideways and let her hand trail in the water. The boat was drifting slowly, and the smooth, cold leaves of the lilies slid past her fingers. She spoke with her eyes fixed on the gleaming ripples.

"What do you think he would have been if you had not converted him?"

"A sculptor."

"A sculptor; perhaps a great one?"

"Possibly. There is no doubt that he had talent; he may have had even genius."

"And you, what have you made of him?"

"Nothing. I waked him up; his own nature did the rest. It has made him what he is: a little candle in a dark place."

"Oh, there's no help in that," she cried out in distress. "All these things are beautiful generalities; I want to come at the truth. He says he had no real talent for sculpture; you say he had genius. If so, you killed it with your politics. Do you think I can't see that he doesn't believe in it all—that he just sticks to it out of pure loyalty, mere hopeless faithfulness to a lost cause? His life has been wasted, and neither you nor he will be honest enough to acknowledge it."

"Do you think it is altogether waste to be the one clean influence in a place like this? What about those poor children? He's the nearest approach to a father that they have. You may not see the usefulness of his political work; but the same quality

that makes him do it makes him the guardian angel of all these weak-kneed folk here."

"I think," she said, looking out across the water, "he must always have been a sort of guardian angel to weaker people. I suppose that's the way he was born."

"You are mistaken. He was born a rather magnificent savage. When I knew him first, he cared about weaker people just in so far as they were good to model."

"But he was a boy when you knew him first ; that doesn't count. He hadn't begun to live."

"He was twenty-one."

"What does that matter ? He had seen nothing ; he had grown up in a desert. Why, it was when he first went to town to learn modelling, wasn't it, like a sort of Dick Whittington, with no money and no introductions ?"

"Yes, and a portfolio full of drawings. He was going to get a scholarship, and go to Paris, and God knows what else. Have you seen any of those drawings ?"

"I never saw anything of his till the model of the hawk to-day."

"He may have burned them. Afterwards he turned his back on the whole thing ; he wrote to me, to Akatui, and said he'd done with dreams and pretty fancies. It's only since he met you that he's begun a little modelling again."

"It's too late now," she said unsteadily. "He'll never be the same again."

"Nothing that gets a soul ever is the same again."

She flared up in sudden anger.

"Ah, that is the arrogance of all you people with causes. No one has a soul unless they go in for your politics. It's like the missionaries with their Christianity; you force your light on people that Nature never meant for it—and they die!"

"There's some truth in that," he assented placably; "only you've got the wrong end of the stick. Russians do have a hard time when they get a conscience; they've not had centuries of inoculation like the rest of us. But I don't think you'd find Volodya would go back to his old self, if he could. Anyhow, there's no use in discussing that; and I want to speak to you about a practical question. When are you going to England?"

"I thought of going when we leave here, at the end of the month. My people would like to have me home as soon as possible."

"I want to ask you not to go. I think it will be better if you stay with him this autumn."

The colour faded out of her cheeks.

"You think he is . . . in danger?"

"No; but I would rather you stayed if you can."

"Why?"

He was silent.

"I am not a child," she said after a moment; "and, as I told you, I don't easily cry. I think you owe me a straight answer. What is it I have to be prepared for?"

"I don't want you to be over-anxious, but I am not satisfied about his health."

"But the last time you sounded him you told me he was better."

"Better for the time. Can you stay?"

"Of course I'll stay. But if anything goes wrong—really wrong, I mean—may I send for you?"

"I am a busy man, as you know, and I don't easily get permission to travel. But I'll come at Christmas, if I can. Don't mention this conversation to anyone. Now we had better go in."

When they entered the house everyone had gone to bed. He lighted the candles on the hall-table, and handed Olive hers.

"Shall I see you before I start?"

"Oh yes, I am always up early."

"Good-night, then."

She hesitated, then put down her candlestick.

"Dr. Slavinski . . ."

He turned to her with a smiling face.

"Yes?"

"I . . . I was a brute just now. It's so new to me, all this cruelty and horror; and then I find myself growing cruel too . . . and saying things that it makes me sick to remember. I said a hideous thing to you . . ."

His hand had clenched itself slowly on the table; otherwise he had not moved.

"I . . . am sorry," she said, and touched his fingers.

The sweat broke out on his forehead. He pulled the hand sharply away, and she heard the sound of his quick, heavy breathing. She drew back slowly, with dilated eyes.

"Have I offended you? You are the only friend I can count on here; please . . ."

"My dear Miss Latham, what have I got to be offended about? Of course you can count on me. And don't get scared about Volodya; he may come through after all. Good-night."

Vladimir was reading in his room. As Karol came in, he looked up smiling.

"Hullo, old man! have you had a good time?"

"First-rate," said Karol, sitting down and rolling a cigarette. "Moonlight and screech-owls and everything complete. It's all very well, but I must get back to work; holidays can't last for ever. But that's a good girl of yours, Volodya—quite a nice girl."

CHAPTER V

KAROL left Lyesnoye early in the morning. The whole family, with the exception of Petya, assembled in the porch to see him off ; and he drove away down the avenue, looking back at the waving hands and handkerchiefs with a smiling face, that grew suddenly old and strained and haggard when the branches of the lime-trees shut him out from view.

He was not given to grumbling at the hardness of his luck, even when, as now, it seemed to him unreasonably hard. And, after all, there were compensations. However scurvily the fates might have treated him in other ways, they had at least granted to him a long and sufficient training in self-control, certainly a thing likely to come in useful now. A man afflicted with a hopeless passion for the woman whom he knew to be the solitary joy left to a friend whose life he had ruined was fortunate if he had learned beforehand not to wince at things. At any rate, he had managed to come through with decency, and that was the principal thing. But for the one instant when the touch of Olive's fingers on his hand had taken him unaware, he had never

lost his entire command over both face and voice ; and neither she nor Vladimir had guessed his wretched secret. Now that the strain was over, he realized suddenly how tired he was ; so tired that he could care for nothing in the world beyond the mere relief of knowing that he need not see her again till Christmas. He leaned back in the cart, and stared with blank eyes at the drifting fog.

She was right, confound her, if she had been a bit brutal in her way of putting things. When you came to think of it, she had, for a person of such wide and comprehensive ignorance, an abominable knack of hitting the nail on the head. It was quite true that he had carried his light into dark places, and that the glare of it had burned up a beautiful thing planted by some unhappy accident in his path. He was too merciful to tell her she was right, and too accomplished a liar to let her guess it ; but it was true, all the same. Looking back now, at thirty-four, on the series of magnificent and pitiful mistakes which made up the sum of his youth, he saw the winning over of Vladimir as the most tragic of his early successes. In those days (how long ago, how shadowy they were !) it had seemed to him the most splendid.

The whole thing had come of the humanitarian fit which had attacked him in youth. A belief in universal brotherhood and the forgiveness of sins seemed to be as inevitable at a certain stage of mental growth as distemper in a puppy. Fortunately one grew out of it, like the puppy ; but it was no joke while it lasted, and he had taken it badly.

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Taught from his babyhood, in the strict, old-fashioned Polish way, to loathe and despise all things Russian, he had discovered, at twenty-one, that national hatreds are played out, and that all men are brothers. At that time he was acting, very successfully, as a political missionary to his own folk, spreading the gospel of national independence among his fellow Poles scattered about the cosmopolitan Gehenna of St. Petersburg. He broke away gradually from the traditions of his family and race; and flinging aside as musty prejudice the lessons of a century's experience, told the grandfather who had adopted him when the last insurrection had left him an orphan that to him nothing human was alien, that he cared for neither Pole nor Russian, but only for the soul in both. Certainly he was very young, and also very much in earnest.

He remembered, as if it were yesterday, how the old man had looked up from his books of devotion and answered with a stately and indulgent patience :

"Yes, yes, there are lots of fine theories about; it's natural, when one is young. But you'll come back to your own folk in the end. They always do if they're sound."

"You brought me up to think that Russians have only teeth and stomachs," Karol remembered saying hotly. "And it's not true; they have souls, just as we have."

"Surely, my lad, surely," the grandfather had answered, crossing himself with a hand crippled by old bayonet-wounds. "But leave God and the

Blessed Mother to save the souls, and do you keep clear of the teeth."

But to keep clear of them was not in Karol's nature. He was, indeed, in those callow, fledgeling days, beautifully indifferent to the precise cost of things. He had accepted, very early, the general axiom that an idea, like any other thing, if worth having, is likely to be expensive; and had definitely made up his mind that he was ready to face whatever personal pain or loss might be the price of his vocation. That any part of the cost might fall upon others had, at that stage of his development, simply not occurred to him. He went about, therefore, like Diogenes with the lantern, looking for a Russian with a soul.

Two years of his youth passed in a superb and futile dream of using Russian hands to avenge his country's wrongs, of raising up champions for her from among the children of her enemies. Then he came across Vladimir.

The mature and practical Karol whom Akatui had cured of dreaming would have left this virgin savage nature in peace with its joy of life, its half-unfolded wings, its gorgeous ignorance. But to the missionary Karol of twenty-three it seemed no sacrilege to handle and improve so beautiful a creature. Of sculpture he knew nothing, and little of human beings; and he looked upon it as a splendid privilege to pluck this white thing from the filth it had grown among, and offer it, as a pearl of great price, to the goddess of his worship. And the result had been the inevitable one, the logical, simple,

merciless action of Western thought upon an Eastern mind.

To Vladimir, once the moral sense had been awakened in him, the irresponsible artist life for which alone nature had fitted him was no longer possible. Yet among the Polish rebels to whom Karol introduced him he found himself a stranger, a half-caste Asiatic, shut out from the understanding of their inner life by the limitations of his fatal Russian inheritance, a strain of yellow blood. When released from prison he broke off all relations but those of personal intimacy with his Polish friends, and joined his wrecked life to such pitiful remnant of civic conscience as was left in Russia itself. The premature attempt to awaken self-respect in a people satisfied as yet with Mongolian ideals faded out miserably ; and Vladimir, not fortunate enough to die quickly like most of his companions, saw the things that had been sacred to him choked in blood and dirt, in persecution and cowardice, in quarrels and intrigues and the betrayal of comrades. Now, in a world of triumphant corruption, of blatant and shameless jobbery, he and such as he remained, here and there solitary, tragic figures, utterly faithful and utterly useless. They could never become Europeans ; Russia was all the world to them, and Russia had no place for them to breathe in, no work for them to do.

Well, it was lucky that there was Olive ; Vladimir would have one little ray of personal happiness at the last. Karol's own position was of less importance. A Pole, with a great industrial movement

growing under his hands, could get on without personal happiness; he had other things to take its place. And by Christmas, perhaps, he might have got accustomed a bit, might be able to meet her without having to keep the rein so tight. If only she wouldn't look at one in that grave, conscientious, maddening way . . .

Anyhow, there were four months of respite, and crowds of things to do. The Dombrova miners' organization had sent him a report; he would have to hunt up a man to put things a bit straight there. And then the new monthly paper that he had started was badly in want of funds, and he must find a better sub-editor. . . . As for his personal misfortune—well, yes, it was bad enough. It seemed an unnecessary brutality that, after keeping clear of emotional complications all these years, he must go under now before just this woman, of all the women in the world. But what has a man been through Akatui for, if he has not learned how to stand straight under any brutality of men or gods?

That was the odd thing about Akatui: the way it would jump up in one's memory without any particular cause, and make the things one happened to be thinking about or worrying over at the moment seem small and far away. Yet it was just the small things in the life at Akatui that had this trick of coming back; long-forgotten shadowy trifles, suddenly fresh and new, distinct in every outline. The big things seldom came back; they lay still, buried very deep and waiting their turn. This time it was not Akatui itself, but a detail of

the march out to it, eight years ago, that came back so vividly.

It was just beyond Krasnoyarsk. He and several of the others had been down with typhus fever, caught on the way, and the escort had gone on with the rest of the party, leaving them in the infirmary. There he had learned the news of his sister's suicide. By the time they were able to march again, and the next escort picked them up, winter had come on, and the frozen road rang like glass under the hoofs of the struggling baggage-horses. There were several invalids, two of whom were women, so the few places in the baggage-carts were always full. As for him, he was quite well again, and sure he could walk. But that day's march was a long one, over sixteen miles, and the east wind, full of sharp ice-needles, drove straight in their faces and delayed them; so when the sun set they were still an hour's march from the wayside barrack where they were to sleep. He was unlucky too; he must have arranged his right leg-wrapper badly, for it had slipped out of place, and the ring of the fetter, sliding up and down as he walked, had rubbed a sore on his ankle. He remembered with an extraordinary clearness the exact sensation of the iron band scraping at each step, backwards and forwards across the wound. There seemed no logical reason why just that particular pain should fix itself so definitely in his memory; but every detail of that afternoon was clear: the perspective of the straight road, gray in the early twilight; the snow-laden pine-branches tossed by the wind; the persistent,

regular, unconscious moaning of a sick woman in the baggage-cart ; the sense of isolation, of endlessness, of tramping on to all eternity in a separate hell of his own. Then he had waked up, lying on his back in the road, half choked with bad brandy, and had seen the officer in command stooping over him, red-faced and plethoric, and the escort staring like stuck pigs. They all looked to him as much alike as so many Chinese idols, rather the worse for wear. He remembered one of his companions, a feverish little consumptive, nicknamed "The Squirrel" for his bright eyes and fuzzy head, saying in a thin, husky, cheerful voice (good old Squirrel, he had grit enough to be always cheerful, right down to the last): "Why, Karol, Karol, we can't have this! If you're going to set up fainting-fits, what are the rest of us to do?"

Karol had taken unreasonable offence, and protested indignantly. He had never fainted in his life ; he supposed he was not a common-law felon to go in for damned nonsense of that sort. Couldn't the God-forsaken idiots see he had slipped on the ice and banged his head a bit ? A man might slip, mightn't he, on these confounded roads ? And he had scrambled up in a hurry, ridiculously eager to prove the accusation false. Then, apparently, he had fainted again, for the next things he remembered were the poisonous air of the barrack where he was lying, staring stupidly at the dirty rafters overhead, and the hissing sound of water boiling over on to the red-hot iron of the stove. They had laid him down on one of the wooden

sleeping-benches, with his coat, neatly rolled up for a pillow, under his head; and somebody was bathing his ankle; the Squirrel, perhaps, but he was far too lazy to turn round and look. Afterwards he lay for a long time, hours—or was it only minutes?—in a state of imbecile passivity, counting the vermin crawling up the wall; counting them by dozens, by scores, by hundreds; entangling himself in absurd calculations about the tangents of the angles at which they crawled and the square root of the number of their legs, and breaking off from time to time to assure himself, over and over and over again, that nothing really mattered, that Wanda was dead, and safe, and out of it all, that he needn't worry about her any more.

Well, well; and here was he, at thirty-four and with more work on his hands than any one man could get through, wasting his time turning over a miscellaneous rubbish-heap of dead and gone memories. Jolly good training all that had been, anyway; a bit rough, of course, but a man would be a fool not to appreciate his luck in having had it young. It was not every fellow that got the chance, before starting on the serious business of life, to find out exactly how much he was worth and what his nerves were made of inside. Two or three years of that sort of thing made a man sure of himself, made him safe, for the rest of his life, from ever being afraid of anything again.

But, God, how it had hurt at the time! . . .

* * * * *

Olive and Vladimir spent the morning in the pavilion. He was anxious to finish the model of the hawk as soon as possible, and had asked her to sit by him while he worked. For three hours they scarcely spoke ; both were absorbed, he in his modelling, she in reading and answering her home letters. A large batch had come by the cart which was taking Karol back to the district town. Father, mother and sister had all written. In her last letter she had spoken of coming home in a fortnight, and the replies were full of their delight. It would be hard for them to learn now, without a word of explanation, that her return was put off till Christmas at the earliest. And yet, to explain by letter would be impossible. She was, on the whole, a bad correspondent, and her letters were usually very short and stiff ; not from any want of affection for her kindred, but from a certain emotional shyness. Even an instant's expansion was rare with her ; and to write down a loving word and see it staring blackly from white paper was to her a most difficult thing. To-day, however, she forced herself to write long letters, wrapping up in as much extraneous gossip of botany and scenery as possible the bald announcement that the friend whom she had come out to nurse was in a more serious state of ill-health than she had known of, and that she must stay on indefinitely. When she came home, she added, they should hear all about it.

Then she began a letter to Dick. Writing to him was easier, for there was no need of explanation. He had written her a long brotherly letter, full of

cheerful gossip about parish work and local flora at Heathbridge, and opinions on the water-rate and George Meredith's last book. For some reason, inexplicable to herself, Dick's letters were more comfort to her in these weeks of wearing anxiety than any other thing. Yet she had little to say to him, and her interest, even in the rare species of toad-flax which he had found in the bit of waste ground behind the churchyard wall, could only struggle faintly to live under a dead weight of depression.

"Olive," said Vladimir.

She looked round. He was wiping the clay from his hands.

"Come and look, will you?"

The model of the hawk was finished. She stood a long while before it without speaking. When he turned to look at her, there was a pitiful little contraction at the corners of her mouth.

"Yes?" he said. "Something wrong?"

"No, no; it's beautiful; but it's so hopelessly, awfully dead."

"So much the better for all little chickens."

"What do the chickens matter? They'll never have wings like that."

"Uncle Volodya!" cried a voice outside.

Vladimir opened the door. His eldest nephew, Boris, was shivering in the fog with a woebegone, miserable face.

"Uncle Volodya, papa's gone!"

"Gone where?" Olive began, and stopped suddenly. Vladimir's face showed her that he understood where.

"What horse has he taken?"

"Itzek's old white mare."

"When was it found out?"

"Only just now. We thought he was down at the new clearing, and when Uncle Vanya came in and said he wasn't there, Auntie sent me round to Itzek. He must have gone before we were up this morning. Auntie's crying in the kitchen. She says there'll be no money to get us new boots for the winter."

The boy began to sob. Vladimir stroked his head tenderly.

"There, there, my lamb; don't cry. I'll go after papa and bring him back. Does Itzek know which road he's taken?"

"The low wood-path."

"Is that open now?"

"Yes, the water's all drained away."

"Then he'll be in town before I can catch him up. Olive, look after the children for me; and don't let Auntie talk about it before the little ones. You won't, Borya, I know."

"Of course I shan't."

"It will be all right," Olive said in her soothing voice. "Borya's got as much sense as a grown-up man; he'll help me look after the little ones. Suppose you take them out to play, Borya, while I go and see to Auntie. Volodya, you had better come in with me; I'll get you some lunch before you start."

"I'll come in presently; I must just see about a horse. Don't get anxious; I shall be back some time to-morrow."

He stooped to whisper a few comforting words to the boy, who had left off crying now, and looked less frightened. Then he laid a wet cloth carefully over the clay model.

"You see," he said, turning to Olive with a smile; "the chickens do matter, after all."

The second day dragged miserably to its close. By alternate soothing and gentle restraining, Olive had managed to keep Aunt Sonya quiet, and had even got the household work done somehow; so far, the younger children knew nothing of any trouble in the family. But now the old lady was becoming restless and excited again; and every hour it was more difficult to prevent her from talking, in the presence of the children, about their father's vice.

"Six o'clock already! And Volodya was to have been back this morning. You may depend on it, my dear, something has happened. I always knew it would end badly. Volodya's too harsh with him; he was always so hard; and now perhaps poor Petya has done himself a mischief, and we sit here . . ."

She began to cry aloud, like a peasant woman.

"Children," said Olive in clear, incisive tones; "run to the three fir-trees and see if your uncle's horse is in sight. Now, which can get there fastest? One, two, three!"

All but Boris scampered off at once. He, with a serious, unchildlike glance at Olive, went silently on with his bread and jam.

"My dear!" The old lady left off crying to scold. "How can you make them run races like that in the middle of their supper? It's so bad for them."

"Less bad for them than to hear that sort of talk," said Olive calmly. "Let me give you another cup of tea."

Aunt Sonya began to cry again.

"Anyone can see you've never known what trouble is, or you wouldn't be so hard."

"Borya," said Olive; "give me your aunt's cup, will you? There's nothing to be upset about, auntie. Volodya has probably been kept a little longer than he expected; perhaps the road is flooded again."

But the old lady only sighed more heavily and shook her head.

"And Vanya never coming in to dinner! Who knows . . ."

A sharp scream from outside made them all start. Boris sprang up and ran to the door, but Olive was before him. She pushed him back gently, went out, and shut the door behind her.

Vanya, with his cap awry and his boots covered with mud, was standing in the porch, holding by the collar a bedraggled, whimpering, barefooted peasant boy. As Olive opened the door behind him, he brought his clenched fist down heavily on the dirty shock head.

"I'll show you how to laugh at your betters! I'm drunk, am I? Eh? Drunk?"

The big fist rose for another blow. Olive stepped

forward silently and caught the lifted arm with her strong hand. He wrenched himself free, and turned on her, swearing ferociously. His face, at other times vacantly mild, was flushed with drink and hideous with a wild-beast rage.

"Go away," said Olive to the boy, who was clinging to her skirt. "Make haste!"

He fled, whining and snuffling. Vanya seized Olive roughly by the shoulders.

"Ah, it's you, is it? Look at the fine lady! Too tender-hearted to see a dirty ragamuffin's ears boxed! All right, my dear; give me a kiss."

He thrust a hot, red face against hers. She turned her head a little away to avoid the reek of spirits, and gave a dexterous sideways twist to the arm she held. His grasp on her shoulder relaxed, and she slipped quickly aside.

"Take care," she said cheerfully; "there's a step. Yes, we'll see about all that presently. Just come in here first; I can't talk to you in the passage. The key? Yes, that's your key. Let me open the door. Do you want to kiss me? Wait a minute, then."

The next instant she had pushed him into his bedroom and locked him in.

She leaned panting against the lintel. He was powerfully built, and though her training had given her the mastery, the struggle had cost her a sprained finger.

He was now trying to kick the door down, yelling imprecations and foul language. Aunt Sonya came hurrying up, and, as usual, burst into tears.

"My dear, my dear, I thought he would have killed you!"

"Nonsense," said Olive, straightening herself up. "Do you think I've never managed a tipsy man before? My hand's a bit hurt, though; I'll just bathe it. Go and finish your tea, will you? Don't be frightened, Borya; it's all right now."

There was a clatter of hoofs on the stones outside, and Borya ran out. Vladimir lifted the youngest child down from his saddle; the others were all clustered about him, quite ignoring their own father, who dismounted in silence and handed over the miserable hired mare to one of the peasant boys lounging about the yard.

"Take her back to Itzek," he said huskily, and went into the house without another word.

Vladimir entered the dining-room with a child on each shoulder, and the other three clinging round him. His face was quite colourless, with black-ringed eyes.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" cried Aunt Sonya, running up to him, ready, as always, for an emotional scene. "How long you've been! and we were so fearfully anxious! Have you brought him back safe? I never slept a wink last night for thinking of it. Is he . . ."

"Wait a minute, auntie," Vladimir interrupted in a choked voice.

He sat down at the table, panting heavily for breath. Presently a fit of coughing began, always a terrible thing with him. The children stood round staring silently, with big, frightened eyes. For-

tunately Olive came in, and, seeing at a glance how utterly worn out he was, brought him some tea before she spoke at all.

"What is the matter with your hand?" he asked, putting down the cup.

She had tied a bandage round the injured place.

"I hurt my finger; it's nothing much."

"Where is Petya?"

"He has shut himself up in his room. No, sit still and rest for a minute."

He had risen, putting her hand aside.

"I'm quite fresh now. Come out here; I want you."

She followed him into the hall.

"Petya mustn't be left alone just now. He has made two attempts at suicide to-day."

"After you got him away?"

"Once in the tavern where I found him; he tried to hang himself. And then on the way home he got in front of me and made a dash for the lake. You know that steep place. I must sit up with him to-night. Keep auntie quiet, if you can."

"You were up all last night, I suppose?"

"I was searching for him till two in the morning. Then I couldn't get him away. He had got with three young beasts from the garrison, and they had betted with their women they would win his dead wife's miniature from him."

"Did they get it?"

"Yes. It's the only thing he never would stake till now. I got it back, though."

"Did you buy it back?"

"I knocked one down, and the others gave it up. I paid them for it afterwards, of course. You had better leave me alone now, dearest; I must find out what he's doing."

She kissed him and turned away. He knocked at his brother's door.

"Petya! Petya! let me in, will you?"

"Go away," a curious, muffled voice answered from within. "Go away; let me alone."

There was a violent rain of blows and kicks on the door of the next room. The drunken man, who had lapsed into silence, burst out swearing again at the sound of voices near him.

"She's locked me in!" he yelled, pounding on the door with fists and feet. "Do you hear that? The English devil has locked me in—me, a nobleman. . . ."

"Petya!" Vladimir called in a sudden, hard voice. "Come out!"

The gambler appeared on the threshold of his room. He had thrown off his riding-coat, but had neither changed his clothing nor washed. His hands were dirty and trembling, his hair matted with sweat, his clothing awry. He looked at his brother's stern face with a vague, terror-stricken stare.

Olive, hearing the noise, had come hastily back, and she, too, shrank a little at the sight of Vladimir's face. He was looking at her bandaged hand.

"I must deal with the other beast now," he said, and unlocked Vanya's door.

The raging brute within sprang at Olive with a

howl. She stepped quietly aside, and Vladimir caught him by the wrist and flung him back into the room.

"Lie down," he said; "and be ashamed, if you can."

His eyes were blazing with anger. Vanya stared at him for an instant, open-mouthed; then shrank down and huddled on the floor, weeping aloud.

"Lie down," Vladimir said again.

The doleful creature obeyed without a word. Vladimir locked the door and turned with the key in his hand to Petya, who stood by, silent, looking on the floor.

"Have you seen Olive's hand?"

The gambler slowly raised his eyes and dropped them again. A dull red crept over his face in patches.

"Vanya did that while I was scouring the country after you. I suppose she was defending your children for you."

The unrestrained sobbing wail of the imprisoned drunkard sounded monotonously through the door:

"Volodya, don't be angry; Volodya, for Christ's sake!"

Petya put up a shaking hand to his throat. He was trying to speak, but his lips trembled so that the words would not come.

"I . . . told you," he said at last; "you should have let me go . . . over. It was the only thing. . . ."

Vladimir gave a little laugh.

"An inquest, to round the thing off?"

At that Olive interfered, feeling that this scene must be put a stop to, at all costs. To her, there was something immodest in the completeness of the wretched man's disgrace; it was like seeing a fellow-creature in the stocks. She stepped forward and took the key from Vladimir.

"Look here!" she said, turning to Petya. "What's the use of all this? Volodya has had no food or sleep since yesterday, and I suppose you haven't either. I don't want to have him ill again. Just take the key and be responsible for keeping Vanya quiet, will you? I'll bring your supper to your room if you would rather be alone this evening. Come, Volodya."

The gambler's hand closed mechanically over the key. He stood silent, not moving a muscle, till the girl was out of sight. Her steady eyes, neither reproachful nor contemptuous, burned him up with shame. He understood quite clearly that he, like the whining drunkard behind the locked door, was to her not a human being, but a case. Even his brother's cold and scorching anger was easier to bear than this professional tolerance, this pitying, assured aloofness of the practical philanthropist, who has seen all the failures and temptations of mankind, and suffered none of them.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day the household had returned, outwardly, to its normal condition. Aunt Sonya, indeed, was quite cheerful again, and as garrulous as a magpie. Petya, haggard and taciturn, went about his work as usual, and even succeeded in making Vanya work. At early dinner he scarcely spoke an unnecessary word, Vanya sat beside him, silent too. Olive kept the children talking merrily, to distract their attention from their father; and, when the meal was over, proposed that she should show them how to make English toffee in the kitchen. The weather was growing steadily worse, and there could be no question of taking them for a walk.

"Volodya," she said, pausing in the doorway, with the children dancing and jumping round her; "I wish you'd go and lie down a bit."

He was looking grievously ill. The fatigue and strain of the last two days had told on him heavily, and he had been coughing for a long time in the night.

"I would rather help make toffee," he answered, picking up the youngest child and perching it on his shoulder. "Mayn't I join?"

"Well, wait till we get the materials ready. Now, chicks, wash your hands, all of you. Yes, I'm coming, auntie."

She put a shawl over her head, and ran out in the pouring rain to the kitchen building. Through a veil of driving vapour she could see the dim figures of Petya and Vanya struggling towards the granary. The watchdogs had shrunk into their kennels, and whimpered piteously as she passed. It was terrible weather.

When everything was ready in the kitchen, she ran back into the house to call the children. They were all in the dining-room, clustered round Vladimir's chair; and as she entered, shaking raindrops from her shawl, she heard his voice. He was telling a fairy-story, and she stopped on the threshold to listen.

". . . So when the Green Caterpillar had crawled up the bulrush, and curled himself round the little spike at the top, he could see quite a long way, right over the heads of all the smaller things. He saw a big, wide place that he had never seen before. It was called the To-morrow Country, because all the children in it were grown up and all the caterpillars had turned into butterflies. (That's what happens to caterpillars when they grow up, you know. What is it? 'And to children?' Well, yes, to some children.) And in the middle of the To-morrow Country there was a big tree—the biggest tree in all the world. The trunk of it held up the sky, and the roots kept the earth together so it shouldn't tumble in when you jump very hard; and the shade

of the branches was so thick and dark that every morning at bedtime (yes, morning is bedtime if you're a star) all the baby stars flew down to hide in them, and tucked their little heads under their wings, and went to sleep till evening. . . . Ah, there's Olive ! Come along and make toffee."

"The toffee will wait," she answered, laughing ; "and I want to hear about the Green Caterpillar."

"Ah, my dear, what's the use ? Our caterpillars won't turn to butterflies. Sashka, am I to take you pickaback ? Hold on tight, then. Yes, my son, if I were the general's big black horse, you might be the general riding on top, very proud and fine ; but I'm only the army baggage mule, and you're a sack of potatoes, so take care I don't kick you off."

When the happy, sticky children were pulling the hot toffee into strings, Vladimir asked Olive to come with him to the pavilion. It was the last week of their stay, and he was anxious to make a model of her hand before going back to town. "I can keep it by me when you're gone," he had said.

She looked doubtfully out of the window.

"But just see how it's pouring ! I don't mind a bit about getting wet, but I don't think you ought to."

"Oh, nonsense ! it's only a minute's walk. Come, dear ; we shall have so little time together, and it's the only place where we can be alone."

They went off under the same big umbrella, which both together could scarcely hold against the violent wind and rain. Reaching the pavilion, they lighted the stove, and dried their clothes against the fire.

Then he got out his modelling-clay, and began to work. Olive sat still, her eyes on the glowing coals. So methodical a person was naturally a good sitter ; her hand, lying on the table, never moved from the position the sculptor had chosen. But her forehead puckered itself into anxious lines ; she was pondering how to tell her lover that she had decided to stay with him till Christmas, without letting him know what Karol thought of his condition. For her own part, she would have preferred to tell him the whole truth ; if his case was a hopeless one, he had the right to know it. But if a man's doctor objects, what can one do ? Presently she raised her head with a quick gesture of decision.

" Volodya . . . "

He looked up, then put down his clay and came across to her.

" Sweetheart, what troubles you ? "

" Volodya, I'm not going back to England the week after next ; I'm going to stay with you. "

" To . . . stay with me ? "

She put her arm round his neck as he knelt beside her.

" You remember, I said I wouldn't marry you till I had told my people at home, and given them time to get accustomed ? I thought that was only fair to them ; but I've been thinking about it since. You know, you're my business in life now ; I'll marry you as soon as you like. "

He made no answer for a while.

" Poor little girl ! " he said, stroking her hair.

" So Karol has been talking to you about it ? "

She released herself with a start.

"Why do you think that? Has he talked to you?"

"Karol and I have talked about many things. How much has he told you, dear?"

"Only that he is . . . not satisfied about your health, and that he thinks I ought to stay till the winter. Volodya, you and I are grown-up and responsible human beings; don't you think we had better be straight with each other? I don't know how far he thinks your lungs are affected; the London specialist said it was a serious case, but not hopeless. Of course, I understand that it would be a crime for a man in your state to have children, but that doesn't take away my right to be with you and nurse you when you are ill, and give you what happiness and . . . comfort I can. After all, you are the whole world to me; nothing can alter that."

She ended a little unsteadily.

"Dear heart," he said at last; "it is I who must be straight with you. It was not my health that Karol was thinking about."

"He said . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know; and I, too, had meant not to tell you. There's a good deal of trouble just now, and some danger."

"Do you mean about . . . political things?"

"Yes; a man who has been arrested lately turns out to be . . . not quite the man he was taken for. He may do a lot of mischief by not knowing how to hold his tongue."

"But, Volodya, why do you stay here with a thing

like that hanging over you ? If you're in danger of . . . of being arrested again, why don't you come to England with me before it's too late ?”

“Just because there is danger, my dearest. If I were to go, it would bring suspicion on others. I could no more—what is it you say in England ?—rat ?—now than you could have run away in the middle of the small-pox after undertaking the work.”

“I never asked you to rat. It's only that I don't understand. Of course, if it's a case of simple duty, like that, there is nothing more to be said. But are you quite sure it is ?”

“Quite sure. I must go to town the first day that I can get permission to travel. It's only that I am waiting for ; otherwise I should have gone back directly I heard anything was wrong.”

“When did you hear ?”

“Two days before Karol left ; I told him about it, and I suppose that's what made him talk to you. There, love, you know as much now as I have a right to tell you. Don't be frightened ; very likely nothing will happen at all. And now I have something to ask of you. I want you to go home to England. If this blows over, I will send for you in a few months, and we will be married.”

“And if not ?”

She sat straight up, and faced him with a challenging look.

“If not, sweetheart, you can't help me ; you'll only injure your nerves uselessly by seeing brutal things.”

"And you would rather I left you and any brutal things there may be to fight it out together?"

"Not if there were anything you could do."

"Volodya, I don't know what you understand by love between a man and a woman. I know what I understand by it: you are mine, and things that happen to you are my things. They won't be any the less brutal for my not seeing them. If I am to lose you, I will stay now, and have all of you that I can."

"As you will, dearest; but for marrying, it is better not just now; you will be safer as a British subject if anything should go wrong with me. You would lose the protection of your Embassy by marrying me, and it is well to have that behind you."

"I don't mind losing it."

"No, but I mind for you. And it is not marriage that matters; it is love."

They sat silent for a long time, hand in hand.

"You see," she said, lifting her head from his shoulder; "there is one thing about all this that is very hard for me. If my life is to be made desolate, it will be for the sake of a thing that is utterly foreign to me, a thing I know nothing about and can't understand."

"Dear, I have not the right to speak about . . ."

"Oh, what does that matter? Of course you can't tell me other people's secrets; and if you could, it wouldn't help me. If you are taken from me, what difference will it make for me to know the particular thing you are accused of? What I want is an assurance, a certainty to go on living with."

"A certainty?"

She turned and looked at him.

"That you, in your own heart, believed it was worth while."

His face hardened suddenly; the soul that had been so close withdrew itself behind locked doors.

"I suppose a man's personal honour and self-respect are usually worth keeping."

"Ah, be honest with me!" she cried out. "Be honest! The question is not what you are to do now; of course I understand you must be faithful to a thing you have once undertaken. I don't raise that point at all; I want to know, if you could go back to the beginning—if it were to do again . . ."

He stopped her with a hand against her lips.

"Hush, hush! If we could go back to the beginning, which of us would have been born?"

She held her breath in unknown fear. After a pause he spoke again.

"The question that you have a right to ask me is: Do I regret what I have done with my life? And to that I can answer as before my own conscience: I have nothing to regret. I and the others are failures; we have not done what we tried to do. We were not strong enough, and the country was not ready; therefore we go under; that is plain. But I would rather fail than not have tried; and the people that come after us will not fail. There; are you satisfied? And now, for God's sake, don't let us ever talk about this again."

Her natural instinct of reserve responded at once; she released herself from his arm, and rose.

"By the way, Dr. Slavinski told me you had a lot of your old drawings. Have you burned them? If not, I wish you'd show them to me."

Apparently she had stumbled upon the wrong subject; a curious irritation showed itself at once in his face and voice.

"Karol might as well have held his tongue; it's not his way to be over-talkative generally. What do you want to see all that old rubbish for?"

"Only because I take a friendly interest in you and your belongings."

"My belongings . . . They're an edifying lot, aren't they?"

She had put on her matter-of-fact manner.

"I can't tell about the drawings till I see them; and as for your other belongings, we came here in the rain to get rid of them, not to talk about them."

"Quite right, Britannia; you shall see the drawings, though they're not worth looking at. You are a bit like Britannia, really; very magnificent, but just a little . . ."

"Dense? Yes, Dick Grey used to tell me I was dense. It has its compensations. Don't you think you'd better dust that portfolio before you drag it out? My dear, let me do it, please; that's not the way to handle a duster."

The drawings had been carelessly tossed into the portfolio; some were crumpled, some dirty, a few torn and burned at the edges. Most of them were rough chalk or crayon studies: legs and arms; bits of gnarled tree-trunk and twisted branches. There

were a few sketches of village life : dogs fighting ; children carrying loads ; old men gossiping ; peasant women drawing water at the well. A tenseness of effort, a vigorous and passionate abundance of life, showed everywhere through the crude and often incorrect drawing. Even Olive, who knew nothing of art, could see that the muscles of the limbs were sometimes wrongly placed ; but the vividness, the sense of strength and movement, the fierce determination to live, which animated all the figures, might have made a better critic forget the technical defects.

" Did you never see anyone or anything at rest ?" she said, putting down the drawings. " All these creatures seem to live in a hurricane."

" I see them at rest now, anyway."

Her eyes followed his to the model of the dead hawk.

" If that's what you call rest . . . No, don't burn them."

She had taken from his hand a large roll of drawing-paper, tied round with string, and was unfastening it.

" They're nothing," he said quickly.

She looked up.

" Do you mean you don't want me to see them ? I beg your pardon."

He stood for a moment looking away, with the roll in his hand, then gave it back to her.

" I don't mind your seeing them. They're sketches for a group I was trying to do ; then I got arrested, and it was never finished. I was . . . a

good bit in love with it in those days. If I'd ever done anything, it would have been that. Yes, look at them."

She untied the roll with an unaccustomed sense of timidity, and smoothed out the sheets. The first ones contained only studies of detail: hands, outlined limbs, drapery and notes of historical costume; then came two faces, repeated over and over again. Some of the attempts were half rubbed or scratched out, as if in discouragement. One face was a young woman's, Eastern in type and regular in feature, always with a profusion of barbaric ornament in the head-dress, always with the same fixed look of wild-eyed terror. The other face was a man's, and over this one Olive lingered for a long while, trying, and failing, to understand its expression. The last sheets showed the woman struggling frantically in the arms of the man, who, with strained muscles, had lifted her from the ground, and seemed about to fling her violently from him.

"Tell me, Volodya, what does it mean?"

He took a volume from a bookshelf, and came back, turning the pages.

"I wanted to illustrate a scene from a lyrical play that appeared some twenty years ago."

"Won't you read the passage? But slowly, please; Russian poetry is so difficult."

"This is very difficult; it's in old language, and full of obsolete forms. It is about Styenka Razin, the Cossack who led the peasant revolt in the seventeenth century."

"Your Jack Cade? Yes, I remember. Didn't

they roast him alive, or something of that sort, when they caught him ?”

“ They did various things, of course. Well, this is where he is with his followers, on board his vessel on the Volga. He has fallen in love with a Persian princess that they have captured ; and one of the elders of his army accuses him of having forgotten his work, and of thinking only about the woman. When the food is brought in, his men begin to throw offerings of bread and salt into the river, according to the old custom ; and he stops them. Here is the passage :

“ Hast thou no richer gift ? Or shall she thank thee
For scraps of bread ? Is bread a marvel to her ?
Can she not break our ships, if she would eat,
And take, the mighty one, till she be satisfied ?

(He rises.)

Nay, not thus meanly shall we thank our mother ;
My gift will please her better ; it is precious.

(He turns his face to the river.)

Oh, thou Volga, mother of great rivers,
Always hast thou sheltered me, hast not betrayed ;
Even as a mother hast thou cherished me ;
Thou hast heaped upon me fame and honour,
Gold and silver, wealth of precious merchandise.
Mother, I to thee have given nothing ;
Nothing have I paid for all thy largesse.
Now, I pray thee, scorn thou not my offering ;
Take it, breadgiver, for it is thine !

Then he snatches up the girl and throws her into the river. . . .”

“ Volodya,” Olive interrupted, turning to look at him with one of the drawings in her hands ; “ I believe there is genius in this.”

He blazed out suddenly in a way that she had never seen before.

"Genius! Every crow thinks its own children white. Can't you see I was fooling—wasting good paper that a better man than I had made, just because I was born a gentleman, and had nothing to do with my time but eat food I hadn't earned, and think myself a fine fellow? Which way is it better than Vanya's drink or Petya's cards? A bit cleaner, perhaps. Do you know what the folk down in the village call my messing about with clay? 'The fancies of the quality.' And they're right. They'd be right if they cut all our throats. The only excuse for our existing at all would be to rid them of worse parasites than ourselves; and that we haven't known how to do. We're rotten, all of us—rotten through and through with laziness and pride. Ah, the fancies of the quality!"

He tossed the drawings back into the portfolio, and pushed it away. Olive stood looking at him.

"When you talk like that," she said at last, "I begin to wonder whether I shall ever understand you at all. I simply don't know what you mean."

"I think you never will."

"Volodya!"

He stood for a moment by the window, with his back to her, looking out at the driving rain. Then he turned round with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You see, my dear, it doesn't depend on you, or on me either, and we can't help it. There's a radical difference between us; we don't dream of the same kind of pig."

"The same kind of . . . ?"

"Ah, you haven't read 'Beyond the Barrier.' There's a story in it of a Russian in Paris who wakes the house by screaming in his sleep; he's had a nightmare about a pig. The landlady tells him: that often happens with her lodgers; the slaughter-house is near, and the pigs squeak in the night. 'Ah, madame,' he says; 'there's a difference. If a Frenchman dreams of pigs, it's of the sort of pigs that men eat; when we Russians have a nightmare, we dream of the sort of pigs that eat men.'"

"I can't understand what you mean," she said again heavily. "I'm very sorry, but I can't understand."

He turned away with a gesture of weary impatience.

"Let us get back to work. How should you understand?"

He placed her hand in the required position, and went back to his modelling. Presently he pushed the clay aside.

"Oh, what's the use? I can't do it."

"You're too tired to work to-day; you had better leave it."

"Do you think it's only to-day? Come, we'll go back to the children."

She put the shawl over her head and took up the big umbrella with a sense of relief. The presence of outsiders would keep her, for the moment, from being dragged beyond her depth.

As they stepped out into the pouring rain, two figures came struggling towards them up the hill.

The foremost one, a coachman in the national dress, accosted Vladimir.

"Would your honour be so kind as to give travellers a shelter for the night? I'm Prince Reprin's coachman, and driving one of the visitors to the shooting-party down Toropetz way. A fallen tree in the road has upset us and wrenched a wheel off the axle; it's a mercy we didn't all go head first into the lake. And in this weather. . . . If your honour would . . ."

"Is anyone hurt?"

"No; but the gentleman's wet and cold, and it's a long way to the place."

"Of course you can't go on to-night; you must sleep here. How many are you?"

"Three; the gentleman and his servant and I. They're French or something; I can't understand a word they say. I left the servant down there with the horses. Here's the gentleman; perhaps your honour can talk to him?"

"Please come in out of the rain," said Vladimir in French. "We will get your things brought up in a minute. But no, I assure you there is no inconvenience at all; we are accustomed to little accidents in this wild district. Enter, please."

He ran across to the house with the coachman, leaving Olive to look after the traveller, who, still apologizing for his intrusion, threw off his wet cloak and held out his hands to the fire. He was a remarkable-looking man, Parisian to the tips of his fingers, with fine eyes and thick, curling white hair.

He looked, she thought, as if he were used to being called "cher maître." The face was oddly familiar to her ; he must be some well-known person whose photographs she had seen.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said. "My name is Duchamp."

She gave a little start ; it was no wonder that she knew the face.

"M. Léon Duchamp, the painter ?"

He bowed again.

"My friend Prince Repnin invited me to join his autumn shooting-party, and I was tempted by the opportunity to see real savage forest. I have never been in Russia before, and speak not a word of the language ; so you may suppose that when the carriage broke down in this wilderness I wished myself safely home in Paris. I am most fortunate to have found such hospitable shelter."

"They are preparing your room," said Vladimir, coming back, out of breath and with a hand to his side. "Will you sit here and rest by the fire till supper is ready ? Your servant is attending to your things."

The hot colour went up into his face when he heard the visitor's name, and then died out again. Léon Duchamp had been one of the dreams of his youth. "If I can once get to Paris to Duchamp," he used to think ; "he will believe in me and help me get my chance."

The painter drew his chair up to the fire, watching his host with keen, dark eyes. He too, like Burney, had noticed at once the haggard beauty of Vladi-

mir's head ; and, cold and tired as he was, his fingers itched to make a sketch of it.

"But, surely, I am among colleagues," he said, catching sight of the modelling-clay. "Monsieur is a sculptor?"

Vladimir stiffened instantly.

"Only an amateur, and not much at that."

Duchamp looked a little surprised at the icy tone of the answer, but merely said graciously :

"You are too modest. That model of the big bird there . . ."

He broke off, and looked at it with a growing interest and wonder.

"It is your work ? But it is remarkable. I assure you that it is remarkable. You have a real talent, without doubt.

"You are indulgent," said Vladimir in a voice that was a warning to go no further.

The Frenchman threw a startled glance at him.

"Pardon !" he murmured ; "I am indiscreet."

Olive intervened with a sort of desperation. All this was to her intolerably painful ; she plunged hurriedly into the first subject that she could think of.

"It would have been a very long drive for one day to Prince Repnin's place, even without bad weather and accidents."

"Yes ; I inquired before starting whether there is any house on the way where we could obtain shelter in case of necessity, but was told there is none. Naturally, no one would contemplate intruding in this manner into a private dwelling-

house. Even after the accident the coachman was very reluctant to trouble you."

"It was not a question of troubling us," Vladimir said in the same stiff manner. "It is only fair to tell you that people avoid this house. As you are a foreigner and a distinguished man, your spending a night here will not expose you to any serious unpleasantness, but you may possibly be called upon to give explanations to the police. I am under supervision as a political suspect and former prisoner."

The painter listened, at first, with a blank look, then his face lighted up suddenly.

"It is an honour for me," he said, and held out his hand. "We of the older generation in France have also suffered. The best friend of my youth died in New Caledonia, and I—I who speak to you . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "I was fortunate in escaping notice. I have survived, to paint."

Theophylacta knocked at the door, and Vladimir took a tray from her hands.

"Your room is ready," he said; "and my aunt thought, as you have been out in the wet, a little hot wine might prevent your taking cold."

As he lifted the portfolio off the table to make room for the tray, a drawing slipped out and fell at the feet of the visitor, who stooped to pick it up. It was one of the attempts at a head of Styenka Razin.

"*Tiens !*" said Duchamp.

He stood looking at it for a moment, then turned to Vladimir without a trace of his gracious Parisian manner.

"But . . . it was not you who did this?" he asked in a queer, sharp voice.

"I did it long ago, when I was quite young."

"And there are more? I may see them?"

Vladimir's face had gone white and pinched about the nostrils.

"If you wish," he said, and laid the portfolio on the table. "I . . . once meant to bring them to Paris for you to see."

"And why . . .?"

"I was arrested."

"Ah! And since then?"

Vladimir looked away from him, then laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's a bit late in the day for me to be thinking about an artistic career, isn't it? This is not a fairy-story world, and I am thirty-two and . . . consumptive."

The painter sat down and opened the portfolio. For some time he examined the drawings without speaking, while Olive and Vladimir stood by the fire with lowered eyes. It seemed to the girl afterwards that she had lived through years in a few minutes of silence. At last Duchamp rose, and, crossing to the other table, looked closely at the model of the dead hawk.

"But it's a crime!" he cried out, turning suddenly. "You hear? . . . a veritable crime! Arrested! And all that lost . . . Ah, what a country! God, what a country!" He threw out his hands with a vehement gesture. "And you, are you not also culpable? To waste your life for plots, for politics

—you, whom the good God made a sculptor ? Ah, for example, were there no other hands but yours . . . ? And you might have been . . .”

“Hush ! don’t say it,” Olive broke in. “Don’t tell us about things that might have been ; we have got to live with the things that are.”

Duchamp stopped short. His eyes followed hers to Vladimir’s face.

“Mademoiselle is right,” he said, and closed the portfolio. “I abuse your patience, talking so long. If you will permit me, I will go and change my clothing.”

Olive went across to the house with him, and was immediately fastened upon by Aunt Sonya, who was in terror lest the salad should not be up to the Parisian standard. When supper was ready, she ran back to the pavilion, ostensibly to call Vladimir, but really to prevent the old lady from doing so.

It was now nearly dark, but twilight and the red glow of the embers showed her an empty room, an open portfolio, and a stove choked with half-burnt paper. She stooped down slowly, and pulled out a charred and crumpled fragment, on which she could still trace the struggling figures of Styenka Razin and the princess.

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTMAS passed, and Olive was still with her lover. They had returned to St. Petersburg a few days after Duchamp's visit; and Vladimir had taken rooms for her near to his, with quiet and friendly people. Having now no patients to work for, she plodded wearily on at Russian grammar, history and literature, while the weeks dragged into months.

For the first time in her life she found her days too long. To her active, definite, and practical mind it seemed as if the heaviest blow that fate could strike would be more bearable than this life of riddles and suspense, of helpless waiting in the dark for a shadowy horror that might never come. Vladimir, between the hack-work at which he earned his bread and the "business" of which they had tacitly agreed to avoid all unnecessary mention, was so much occupied that they had little time together; and that little was slowly becoming to both a distress rather than a solace. In the strained condition of his nerves and hers, it was no longer possible for them to enjoy, as in the old days, desultory talk of outside matters; yet whenever they tried to speak

of anything that was real to them, one or the other would strike against an unseen barrier.

Olive, always reserved, grew more and more so under the chilling influence of mystery and vague, cold disappointment. She was of a character essentially stable and temperate. To fling aside the habits, the aims and professional ambitions of all her youth, and follow her lover out into a menacing and unknown world, had been to her an even harder thing than most women would have found it; she lacked the perception of romance which might have sustained many natures. And having taken so momentous a step in the dark, she found that it had led her nowhere. Notwithstanding the love between them, unclouded by an instant's doubt on either side, they seemed to be drifting steadily further apart. She would have been content, however hopeless her own future looked to her, had she but been able to feel that her presence was any real comfort to him; but the bitter complaint: "You don't understand! you don't understand!" drove her back upon herself, discouraged and bewildered. It was true; she understood only that he suffered and that she could not help him.

He suffered, indeed, so much that all other things were blotted out to him. The numbed life in him had stirred again at her coming, and she had brought no help. His days went by in a blank round of mechanical duties, his nights in raging misery. He longed at times for the beast to spring quickly, and have done with it; so mean, so poor, so empty seemed the hours, any one of which might be the

last. He looked back over his past life, and saw but ghostly processions of dreams unfulfilled, of statues unmodelled, of joys untouched; tragic abortions of the things that might have been. In the future awaited him drudgery, weariness, the old, hard, uncongenial duty, the old, heavy chain to drag; then, perhaps, an obscure and useless martyrdom for a faith that he had found wanting, and beyond that the black unknown.

Now that the danger had come so close a furious craving took hold on him to live while he might. What it had cost him to refuse the girl's offer to marry him at once she would never understand as long as she lived. It was not in her to understand those things; elemental passions had no place in her ordered life. It would be a crime to force upon her his selfish longing for joy. The whole thing was hard enough for her already without this other sacrifice.

He had no illusions about her feeling in the matter. He knew that she loved him enough to give herself at any moment and under any conditions that he should ask it of her; but he knew also that if she did so it would be in the same spirit in which she would have given her right hand, or her life, to comfort him. He had won her uttermost devotion, but he had not awaked the woman in her. Though she was nearly twenty-seven, and had walked for years alone and open-eyed among human lives, and tragedies, and passions, her nature had still the maiden wholeness of a child's; and he, who had struggled and starved so long, would starve a little

longer rather than disturb her peace. It would be unfair to accept so much from her if he had to die so soon and leave her desolate. But there were times when this very thought, that he might have to die so soon, swept down upon him with a terror of emptiness, with a mad desire to seize his joy and devour it in secret, so that, should the darkness come swiftly, he might have lived before it came, if only for one little hour.

But that coming of the darkness seemed, after all, unlikely. Since August he had waited with strung nerves, telling himself, night after night, that as he had lived his life with self-respect, so he might hope to get out of it with decency, and not to wince when the time came; and that this, indeed, was the only thing of any consequence. Now January was here, and he was still waiting.

"It must have blown over," he said to Olive one day when she was sitting with him in his lodgings while he worked. "If it were coming it would have come before now."

She scarcely smiled at the reassuring words. Long months of suspense had worn the spring of her nature, and it no longer responded.

"If you feel sure about that," she said, "I will go home and see my people; they are getting so anxious and worried about me. But are you sure?"

"How should I be sure? But, you see, nothing has happened so far. You had better go home, dear; it is hard on your people to wait so long."

She shook her head.

"I have told you that I will not go while there is

any doubt. Perhaps you and your friends will be able to find out soon just how matters really stand."

"When Karol comes. He can often get information about our affairs that we can't get ourselves; he has friends and connections everywhere."

"Will he come next week, do you think?"

"Very likely. Now that the Emperor has left town, he will probably get permission to come."

Vladimir himself had just been expelled from the town for a few days. This happened to him, as to all other suspected persons, every January, before the Emperor's arrival for the blessing of the river ice, and on all occasions of important festivals and ceremonies throughout the year. He and Olive had spent the enforced holiday quietly by Lake Ladoga, and had returned to town when the pageant was over.

"I will wait till he comes, at any rate," she said in a dull tone, and looked out of the window. The pulse in her throat was beating heavily.

"Volodya," she said at last; "when I go home . . ."

He was sitting at the table, putting a cog-wheel into the plan of a machine.

"Yes?" he said.

She turned her head and watched him at his work. Unemotional as she was, the sight of the sensitive, wonderful hands that had found no better work than to draw cog-wheels and pumps and levers for two pounds a week brought sudden tears into her eyes. But he did not see; his head was bent down over the plan.

"Yes?" he said again.

She still hesitated ; the thing seemed so horrible to say. When she said it at last it sounded quite commonplace.

"Is there any real use in my coming back?"

The hand holding the pencil grew rigid ; he sat like a statue and made no sound.

"Volodya," she began again desperately. He laid down the pencil.

"No one but yourself can judge of that," he said in a still, even voice. "As for me, all the giving between us has been on your side, and all the receiving on mine. It is clear that I can have nothing to say. If you feel that you have made a mistake . . ."

She suddenly remembered telling him in the summer that he was the whole world to her. It was more true than ever now, but now she could not say it. She said only, in a lame way :

"Is it not you that have made a mistake?"

He was silent.

"You see," she added drearily ; "you have told me yourself, so often, that I can't understand."

"No, you can't understand. That is . . . lucky for you."

He rose to leave the room. His face and movement had something measured, something that terrified her. She caught his arm as he passed her.

"Oh, it's you that don't understand!"

He seemed to stiffen under her touch. "Perhaps," he said. "But, after all, it matters very little which of us it is that fails to understand."

"Volodya ! Why will you make it so hard for

me? Can't you see I'm only trying to do what is right?"

He broke into a little quick laugh, and freed his arm from her hand.

"One can trust you to think always of what is right, my dear; but . . . not quite always of what is bearable."

Then he went into his bedroom and shut the door.

She found herself panting as if she had been running too fast, and sat down helplessly at the table.

Someone came into the room with a leisurely, heavy tread. "The maid with the tea-urn," she thought, bending her head lower over the unfinished plan.

The footsteps paused beside her chair, and she looked up. Karol, very big and quiet, stood looking down at her.

"Ah!" she said softly. "You?"

The eyes that saw everything travelled over her face, noting how thin she had grown, how sleepless her eyelids looked, how the line of her mouth had changed.

"Yes, I was afraid you'd be having a bad time," he said; and at the sound of his lazy, drawling speech she felt comforted without knowing why. "Is Volodya worse?"

"Not in health, I think. It's not that."

He waited, patiently observant, guessing before she told him where the trouble lay. She drew in her breath tragically.

"It's horrible to stand by and see him like this.

It's killing him, and I'm no help at all; I'm worse than useless."

She bent her head again over the plan.

"If I could do anything to help him! But I can't even understand; I have tried, and I can't."

"Don't you think," Karol said, "that you would do better by just accepting that as a fact, and not trying so hard? People manage to be a lot of help to each other sometimes, even without understanding all those difficult and complex things."

"Not I; I've only made him more unhappy than he was before. Perhaps he will feel it less now you have come; you always understand."

He smiled; and she realized for the first time how stern a face it was when he was not smiling.

"I? Ah, yes; it is my trade to understand. And then, I've had plenty of practice."

Vladimir came in with an outstretched hand and a brave attempt at gaiety.

"Hullo, Karol; we didn't expect you till next week."

"They signed the permit for this week, and if I'd asked to have it changed I might have lost it altogether. Any news?"

"No; just the usual jog-trot. You're looking a bit dragged, old man; overworked?"

Olive had not noticed it before; but now that her attention was called to Karol's looks, she saw that he was, indeed, not quite like himself.

He stayed chatting with them for a few minutes; and then went away, saying that he had "lots of stupid things to do," and that he would come and

spend the day with them to-morrow. He had taken the same lodgings as before. The lovers stood silent for a moment after the door shut behind him.

"Olive," Vladimir said in a hurried way, without looking at her; "I beg your pardon if I was unkind just now. Of course, you must decide as you think best. I know the whole position is . . . very hard for you. . . ."

She turned and clung to him with her face against his arm.

"Nothing is hard but to know that I'm only hurting instead of helping you. But it is a matter of right and wrong. What can I do?"

He stood holding her close to him.

"I wish you would try to explain a little," he said at last. "We seem to be groping in the dark, and making each other wretched for nothing."

"You see, the whole thing looks to me wrong as well as useless. I can't believe that any good is ever done by meeting violence with violence. If the Government is brutal and senseless, that's all the more cause why you should be guided by something better than anger. It all seems to go round in the same vicious circle; because they have done you hideous wrongs, you try to be revenged; they strike, and you strike back. And which way does all that help the people?"

"It's not a question of revenge; it's a question of loyalty."

"Loyalty to your own side; and the world is none the better for your taking sides so bitterly. I can't . . ."

Her lips began to quiver again.

"I don't think it would be right for us to marry while we feel differently about a thing that is so serious. However much I love you, I should be nothing but a grief and a discouragement to you once I can't believe in your work."

He stooped and kissed her hair.

"It is not that you can't believe, my heart; it's only that you can't understand. What did you say, Masha? Someone for me?"

The maid was knocking at the door. He went into the passage, and came back after a moment with an anxious look.

"I must go out at once on business. I'll come round to your place when I get back."

"Shall you be long?"

"I hope not; but I may be kept."

"You won't get wet, will you? This damp weather is so treacherous."

"It won't last; we shall have frost again before night, I think. Good-bye, dear."

She held out her hand, but he pulled her to him, kissed her in a vehement, fierce way, and went hastily out.

She walked to her lodging through drizzling sleet, got out her Russian grammar and dictionary and the book that she was in the middle of struggling with, and worked for three hours. Then she realized that the room had grown very cold, and that her windows were frosted with ice.

She waited for Vladimir till evening. Anxiety and suspense had long been her daily companions,

and usually she was patient enough ; but when eight o'clock struck, and he had still not come, she went back to his rooms in search of news.

The wet and snowy pavement of a few hours ago now rang under her feet, hard, slippery, and clear like glass. The wind had veered to the north-east, and the temperature had dropped with deadly swiftness.

Vladimir had not returned, so, after making what preparations she could in case he should come in chilled, she sat waiting. At half-past nine he dragged himself up the stairs and stumbled in, livid and gasping for breath, his hands like a dead man's, his beard and clothing stiff with ice.

"Ah, thank God!" he murmured when she ran out to him.

He was too utterly exhausted to do anything but abandon himself passively to her ministrations. It seemed to her at first that she would never get him warm again. Till after ten o'clock she was too busy to ask him what had happened, and he too weary to talk.

"Now," she said at last, sitting down beside his bed ; "you may tell me whether anything serious has happened."

"I think it's all right now ; but there was an alarm among some of our people. It looked rather bad at the moment, and they sent round for me in a hurry. Then on the way to one house where I had to go I found a spy after me, and it took me hours to get rid of him."

"How do you manage to get rid of them?"

"You walk them down; lead them a wild-goose chase all over the town, and then double, the way a hare does, or turn into a courtyard that has a passage through to the next street. You see, you can't go to another man's house with spies behind you."

"Because of getting him into trouble?"

"Of course. And I couldn't get rid of this one. I walked till we were both wet through; then the weather changed."

"You got rid of him at last?"

"Oh yes; and got the business done. I think everyone's safe now."

"Then go to sleep. I shall be in the next room if you want me."

"But, my dear, you must go home to bed. Why, what a fidget you are, child! There's nothing wrong with me; I was only cold and tired."

He knew as well as she did the danger of such a chill to a man in his state of health. But as he chose to take it that way, she fell in with his mood, and answered lightly:

"Of course it's all right; but I'd rather stay here, just to make sure. I can't help being a fidget if I was born so."

She said nothing more to him, but sent a note to Karol's lodging, asking him to come at once. He was out, the messenger told her, and would not be back till late. She waited in the other room, stepping softly to the door from time to time to listen for her patient's breathing. About one in the night she heard him call her in a stifled voice, and went in.

He was sitting up in bed, with glittering eyes and a hot flush.

"I'm sorry . . . to be . . . such a nuisance, . . . but I've . . . got it in . . . earnest this time. . . ."

An hour later he was delirious, with a fearful temperature. While she was trying to quiet him she heard the door-bell ring, and went out to meet Karol in the passage. Coming in out of the frost, powdered with snow from the crown of his fur cap to the soles of his goloshes, he looked rather like a grave and shaggy Polar bear.

"Pleurisy again?" he asked, taking off his wraps and shaking the ice from his beard with a ponderous, deliberate movement.

"It looks too bad for that. I'm afraid it's inflammation of the lungs."

He followed her into the sick-room. When they came out again he told her the truth without hesitation, looking her straight in the face.

"Yes, both lungs, and badly."

She was as white as her collar, but quite steady.

"Do you think there is any hope at all?"

"A little. With most nurses I should say: almost none; but, you know, cases like this depend as much on the nurse as on the doctor. If anyone can save him, perhaps you can. At any rate, you can try."

CHAPTER VIII

"I THINK," Karol said, coming out of the sick-room, "we may count the immediate danger as over."

Olive raised her head with a start. She was so worn out by the incessant strain of the last fortnight that she could not sit still for five minutes without falling half asleep. At the beginning she had entreated Karol not to call in a second nurse. "You might get someone who would be careless or forget something; and one little mistake now would kill him. We are safer if we do everything ourselves; and I'm strong—much stronger than you think."

He had consented to let her try; and there was no doubt that she had managed wonderfully well; he could not have found a more efficient and trustworthy nurse. But the tax on both had been very heavy. For the whole fortnight they had slept only in broken snatches here and there. Even Karol, an unusually strong man, was beginning to feel giddy when he stooped; and the girl, he thought, was like a haggard ghost. He stood looking down gravely at the white face lifted to his.

"You have pulled him through, my girl, though I

scarcely thought you'd do it. He won't die now, unless some new thing turns up."

She was still looking at him with parted lips, in a helpless way that made him wonder whether she would begin to cry the next minute, or faint instead from sheer fatigue. But she did neither. She dropped her head on to the table and went instantly to sleep.

At the end of the following week the patient sat up in bed for a few minutes. This was counted as a great festival, though he soon had to lie down again, and could not talk except in a very weak voice, with stops in the wrong places. After a while he gave up trying and lay still, holding Olive's hand with thin fingers, and fixing brilliant, sunken eyes upon her face.

This was the happiest day she had ever known. Though still very tired, she was no longer dazed with fatigue, and had realized at last that her lover's life was saved. But this was only one of the day's joys. That he was no longer suffering bodily was much; to know his mind at peace was far more; but the greatest happiness of all was the change in herself. While the danger lasted she had been too busy, and since it passed too tired, to think at all of anything but the moment's needs; now it seemed to her that she had awaked, to find the old nightmares gone and daylight come instead. To her temperament nothing was fearful but the unknown. She had courage in plenty and to spare for any practical emergency; the intolerable thing to her was an unanswered question. Her pathway might be difficult and stony, but if it

was clearly defined, she could tread it cheerfully; a wilderness without a track was a horror that she dared not face. The strain of living side by side with her lover, close to him, yet unable to understand his inner life, to see from his angle of view, had begun to wear out her youth. Now, since she had come so near to losing him, these subtle griefs were of no moment; she could wait patiently to understand, perhaps, in the future, and know meanwhile that all was well with her, for she had got him back again.

Two days later he had grown so strong that Karol lounged out into the kitchen, where Olive was making a custard, with a gleam of laughter in his tired eyes.

"There's no doubt about Volodya being convalescent; he swore at me just now when I wanted to take his temperature."

She looked up, smiling.

"That's always a joyful sign. My father says he guessed, when I was quite small, that I should take to sick-nursing, because after my little sister had nearly died of croup, I tore down the road to meet him, waving my hat for joy and shouting: 'Dad! Dad! She's cross!'"

She broke off in the middle of a laugh, and sighed.

"Poor dad!" she said to herself.

"I suppose your people were good to you when you were a child?" Karol said, with his eyes on the fire.

She looked up in amazement.

"Good to me? Dad and mother? Why, they'd cut themselves into little pieces for me."

She paused for a moment, looking at him, then asked softly:

"Didn't . . . weren't your parents kind to you?"

"They did the only thing they could for me: they left me things to remember. My father was shot when I was a tiny mite, and my mother died in prison. I can just remember the news of her death coming, and my old grandfather making me kneel down before the crucifix and promise . . ." But instead of telling her what it was that he had promised, he remarked lazily: "It must be rather jolly to have parents, if they're a decent sort," and went back into the sick-room.

When she came in with the custard, Vladimir's little pet Kostya, the porter's child, was perched on the edge of the bed, chattering and gurgling with delight. For three weeks he had been fretting to see his friend, whom, for all the mother's scolding, he persisted in calling "Volodya," instead of "Vladimir Ivanych."

"Volodya's going to give me a horse to-morrow, for carnival; and you're to buy it, doctor; he said so—didn't you, Volodya? A black horse with white feet . . ."

"All right, I'll remember; but you must run away now; Volodya's tired."

"Good-bye, Kostya," Vladimir called, as Olive carried the child out; and the little voice piped back:

"Good-bye, Volodya."

"I've a lot of things to do," Karol said when she came back. "I shall sleep at my own lodgings, and come round in the morning. Don't sit up. Volodya's all right now, so long as he doesn't catch cold. Keep the room warm, though; the weather

report predicts another snow-storm for to-night. Oh, and I want to make an alteration in the diet-sheet. At midnight and at two . . ."

"Let the girl alone, Karol," said Vladimir irritably. "You ought to have been an old woman, fussing about that way."

The word "fussing," applied to Karol, set Olive laughing again. She was happy enough to see cause for laughter everywhere to-day.

"It's all very well to laugh," Vladimir said; "but you're gone all to skin and bone. Put your diet-sheet and all your rubbish on the table here, and go to sleep properly, like a reasonable woman. If I want anything in the night I'll get it myself."

"And catch another chill, and have the whole fortnight's performance all over again? No, thank you, dear; once is enough."

"Besides, you wouldn't have it all over again," said Karol. "If you were to catch a chill just now, there'd be an end of you altogether; so lie still and keep warm. Good-bye till to-morrow."

Evening came with a rapidly falling thermometer and snow-clouds rolling in from the north. Olive settled her patient for the night early, then lay down on the sitting-room couch, and slept soundly till nearly midnight. She had the trained nurse's gift of waking at any moment that she chose. The first thing she saw on opening her eyes was a mass of white blurs racing horizontally past the window; the snow-storm had begun. Coming into the sick-room punctually as the clock struck twelve, she found Vladimir lying awake, wide-eyed, with a tragically-

set mouth. When, having carried out her instructions, she turned to go, he caught her hand and clasped it tightly.

"Olive. . . ."

She sat down beside him.

"Yes, dearest?"

"You remember what you said that day before I went out?"

"Yes, I remember."

"You were quite right. It's nothing but selfishness in me to keep you here; it was nothing else from the beginning. I had no right ever to drag you into such a life as mine."

"But you didn't drag me; I came."

"Well, well, put it that way if you like. Anyhow, you're here, wasting your youth over a worn-out wreck that's only fit to die like a mangy rat in a hole. . . ."

"My dear, you would very much oblige me by remembering that it's not manners to throw bad names, in my presence, at the man I happen to be engaged to. And I should be still more grateful to you if you wouldn't try to talk at night when you're feverish."

He flung off her hand with a passionate gesture.

"Ah, you fool me as if I were a child! Do you think I can't see what your love is—just a sort of glorified pity? You come along like an angel of compassion, and hold my hands to make me forget what they could have . . ."

He broke off, biting his lip; and the girl covered her eyes, remembering how in the black days of

delirium his fingers had moved incessantly upon the coverlet, modelling in imaginary clay.

"Volodya," she said, turning to him gravely; "I didn't want to talk about it till you are stronger; but since you persist, I will tell you now. I see all this in a different light since you were ill; there are still many things that I don't understand, but I'm quite happy and content to go on without understanding. I don't particularly mind whether we ever marry or not; that seems to me a very little point beside the other, the real thing. Don't you see? I've carried you back in my arms from the very edge; you're just as much mine as if you were my own child. Nothing matters, so long as I can hear you breathing and know you are safe. There, now go to sleep. Ah, my dear, is the pain worse again?"

He burst out laughing harshly.

"I didn't know you were so clever at tacking pretty names to ugly facts. It all comes to the same thing: you give, and give, and I on my side have nothing to give. Even Karol can see that, though he won't acknowledge it. He told me to-day you had a 'maternal instinct,' and I ought to let you indulge it. . . . But Karol can . . . always beat me at argument; he . . . gets his . . . wind so cheap. . . ."

He turned his head away with a quick, impatient sigh; and she, leaning back in her chair, looked fixedly out of the window. Past its square of dull and frosty blackness hurried endless troops of snowflakes, driven by a merciless wind. Her heart sank

within her at the sound of Vladimir's uneven, laboured breathing. She turned to look at him; he lay with closed eyes, and the sharp contraction of his forehead at every rise and fall of the lungs sickened her as though the stab were in her own chest.

There was a knock at the door.

"A telegram!" a man's voice called. "It's marked 'Urgent.'"

"Something wrong with dad," flashed across the girl's mind. She rose hastily.

"At once . . ."

Vladimir's hand on her wrist stopped the beating of her heart.

"It's not a telegram," he said.

* * * *

When the gray mist lifted she turned and looked at him. He was leaning forward with arms outstretched to embrace her, laughing, radiant.

"Sweetheart, haven't we quarrelled enough for a life that is so short? Kiss me, and open; it is death that knocks at the door."

"A telegram!" the voice repeated; but they scarcely heard it. She stooped over him, and they kissed each other on the lips. Then she unlocked the door. As the blue-clad figures burst in with a rush, something broke and vanished; something golden, that shivered into atoms and fell as dust about her feet.

* * * *

She stood beside the bed, quite still, seeing without interest the shamed faces of the men, hearing

without attention the officer's courteous phrases. "Seriously ill . . . discharge of a painful duty . . ." It all went past her, like a thin breeze far off.

Curiously monotonous and commonplace it was, too; a dull thing of every day, that she had known since the world began; had lived through, surely, oh, how many thousand times before!

It was Vladimir who was talking now. His voice was not contemptuous; it was merely indifferent. "How bored he is!" she thought; and wondered that he cared even to finish the sentence.

"As you wish, gentlemen; it is your trade, of course. Shall I dress?"

The officer's eyes dropped. He looked at the window, at the hunted snowflakes, then at Olive's face; and turned to the assistant procurator, who stood beside him, a black, buttoned-up figure, thin-lipped, precise, with shifty eyes.

"It's awkward," he said, under his breath. "A night like this . . ."

"Yes," the other answered in a gentle, purring voice. "There are twenty-four degrees of frost."

He turned, smiling, to Vladimir. "This room is very warm; perhaps the air will do you good. Lung trouble, I understand? A very distressing complaint; but the doctors are all for the open-air cure nowadays."

"We scarcely need to discuss that," Vladimir answered, in the same tone; "seeing that you have already signed the warrant."

Olive spoke for the first time, in the manner of one asking merely for information.

"Is it a death-warrant?"

The assistant procurator fixed her suddenly with his blue eyes. Two little points of hidden laughter gleamed behind the half-closed lids, and vanished.

"And who may you be?" he said.

"Olive!" the sick man cried out in a voice so imperious, so beseeching, that she ran to him in terror. He caught her wrist with a hot hand.

"Dearest, it's useless; it's utterly useless to resist! You don't understand . . . it kills me to see you with that snake, when I can't get up and strangle him. He'll insult you . . . he'll laugh at you. It's Madeyski."

She only stared at him. She had heard Karol speak of a Pole named Madeyski who had made a successful career for himself by taking service with the Russians; but she was still too ignorant of the new world into which she had entered to understand why a Polish renegade should be worse to deal with than any other Russian official.

He was standing close behind her now, with lifted eyebrows and an interrogative smile. "You were saying . . . ?"

Vladimir's face set like a mask. "I was saying that my keys are hanging on a nail beside the stove. This lady is Miss Latham, a British subject and a certificated sick-nurse. She is so kind as to sit up by me at my doctor's request. But we are detaining you, gentlemen."

His voice was growing faint and husky. Olive sat down beside the bed, saying with authority:

"The patient must not talk any more just now."

Madeyski glanced at her sharply, then bowed, smiling, and turned away.

The searching of the rooms occupied two hours ; and all the time Olive sat holding her lover's hand. When he coughed she lifted him in her arms, supporting his head against her breast ; otherwise they were still. The presence of strangers in no way disturbed them, nor had they any desire for speech. Footsteps and voices and moving shapes of men were close to them, the snow beat against the window, the clock struck and struck again ; they remained silent, with locked hands.

A few minutes before two she rose, lit a spirit-lamp, and began to warm a measured quantity of beef-tea. She was quite methodical, as always. Madeyski came up to her.

"What have you there ?"

She pointed to the diet-sheet. When she poured out the liquid he took the cup from her hand, dipped the spoon, smelt it and touched it to his lips, then handed her back the cup.

"Yes, he may have that."

She removed the spoon, carried the tray to the bedside, and sat down again in silence. A vague trouble flickered in her eyes. Why had she not thought of such a simple thing ? A little prussic acid . . . it would have been so easy to give unobserved ; and it would have saved him from the cold. But she had no poison in the house ; one thinks of these things when it is too late.

Before half-past two the search was finished ; nothing, of course, had been found. The official

report of the arrest, with the names and status of all persons present, was then drawn up and read aloud ; and the two detectives in plain clothes who attended as witnesses came forward and signed. The officer glanced at Madeyski ; then, with an unwilling face, approached the bed.

"The sledge is at the door. The lady may go into the other room, and my men will help you dress."

Nothing stirred in Olive's face. Vladimir touched her hand with a lingering caress of light finger-tips.

"Go, dear love ; it is the end."

She flashed out in sudden anger.

"Lie still ! You are my patient ; you shall move when I give leave."

She rose deliberately, set her back against the door, and faced the officials, saying in her negative, professional manner, with a slightly lowered voice :

"The doctor in charge of the case must be sent for. In his absence I am responsible for the patient's life, and I cannot let you pass till he comes."

Madeyski approached her softly, peering at her with his narrow gaze. He had not met before a woman of quite this kind, and she interested him. He came very close, then drew back a little, seeing danger in her eyes. A hush had fallen upon the onlookers ; they waited, holding their breath.

No knife, no vitriol, nothing but empty hands. . . . There was a paraffin lamp on the table, but that was out of reach, and she herself had screwed the burner tight. . . . No, empty hands. . . .

Her eyes crept downwards to the apple of his throat, just visible above the tight, stiff collar. . . .

As the doubt grew in her face, Madeyski's lips relaxed into a smile. He turned to the officer.

"Pardon me, the examination is incomplete; we had forgotten to have the woman's person searched."

Vladimir's sharp, passionate outcry: "She is a British subject; it's illegal!" struck against her ears and had no meaning. Even when she saw Madeyski turn away, laughing softly to himself, she only whispered vacantly: "The woman's person. . . ."

Something had rushed towards her, menacing, black, formless. . . . No, that was nothing; she was alive and awake, and there were men's hands upon her. One, that held her wrist, had a mark like an old scar below the knuckle of a hairy finger. . . .

She saw a spectre start up with a loud and dreadful cry, a white sheet, like a shroud, flung off and trailing; then the men were somehow swept aside, and she knelt alone over the senseless body on the floor.

"Oh, he is dead!" she cried.

He had been knocked down in the struggle.

She was, of course, not searched; the suggestion had been a joke, and was now tacitly dropped.

Vladimir recovered consciousness at last, and looked round, sighing heavily. Olive was kneeling beside him, her arm about his neck. Seeing that he was trying to speak to her, she bent down and put her ear close to his lips.

"Let . . . go . . . So soon . . . over . . ."

She rose and moved away in silence. The one thing left that she could do for him was, it seemed, to let him die as quickly as might be.

Dressing was slow work; every few minutes he had to stop and rest, and twice he fainted again. When it was done the men half led, half carried him downstairs, and out into a black and whirling chaos, that glittered in the lamplight, full of needle-points. The closed sledge was waiting by the door, a white mass looming indistinctly, with ghostly horses sheeted all in frost, their breathing gray around them like a cloud.

At the first onslaught of the wind Vladimir staggered, caught at the metal bar of the sledge with his bare hand for support, and wrenched the hand away, the skin burnt off with frost. One of the gendarmes, forgetting his uniform and the presence of his superiors, flung an arm round him.

"Oh, why didn't I help you?"

There were tears in his eyes. Vladimir looked at him in wonder.

"Why, man," he said; "that doesn't hurt."

Seated in the sledge between two gendarmes, he turned his head and looked out. The officer was standing near giving directions to his men, who listened sullenly, with lowered eyes. On the doorstep stood the porter's wife, crossing herself and praying aloud. Kostya, snatched up from his bed and hastily wrapped in a fur cloak, clung to her skirt, sobbing and terrified. Olive was not beside them. She stood close to the sledge, bare-headed under the storm; the frozen breath white on her lashes, white snowflakes eddying round her. Her face was empty as a slate from which the writing is rubbed out.

"Anna Ivanovna," Vladimir called to the porter's wife; "take Kostya in; he will catch cold."

At the sound of his name the child broke away from his mother's hand, and, scrambling into the sledge, sobbed on Vladimir's neck.

"Volodya! Volodya! Why are they taking you away?"

"Kostya!" the mother called. "Come back—naughty! Come back!"

"But why?" the little wailing voice persisted. "Why must you go with them? It's so cold!"

Madeyski stepped forward.

"Put the child down," he said to the men.

Kostya looked round, saw the bland face close to his, the narrow eyes, the smiling mouth; and flung himself bodily upon Vladimir, shrieking, mad with fear.

"It's the black man! Volodya, he'll put you in a hole under the ice. . . ."

Vladimir's set lips quivered suddenly; he put a hand up and covered his face.

"Get away there, you little devil!" the officer cried in desperation, and added softly to Madeyski: "Look here, we shall have the men out of hand in a minute."

Vladimir stooped and kissed the tumbled head.

"Hush, midget, hush! I shan't be cold long. And then, you know, it's carnival to-morrow, and the broken things have got to be swept away, haven't they? There, there, go back to bed; you'll understand when you get bigger."

Kostya had left off struggling and screaming; he

listened with wide eyes, overawed. Then he submitted, holding out fat arms to be lifted off the sledge. As his mother carried him away, his solemn baby face, the round cheeks glistening with icicles that had been tears, looked back over her shoulder at this unknown, silent, midnight world, where grown-up people cry.

In Olive's face there was no change. Only some shadowy wonder at these outsiders and their facile grief had flitted over it and faded out again. Vladimir stretched a hand to her.

"Good-bye."

She answered him, as one who talks in sleep:

"You may be satisfied; I shall remember."

"What is it?" Madeyski asked, thrusting an affable face between them.

She turned blank eyes towards the sound. Her understanding had ears for only Vladimir's voice; and it was he who answered, as the runners grated on the snow:

"Nothing; only that carnival begins to-morrow, and 'even in our street there'll be a holiday.'"

"All in good time," said Madeyski, smiling and gracious. "The lady may rest assured; you, at least, shall have a holiday."

There was no answer. Vladimir's cough had begun again, and its tearing sound struck back on Olive's ears above the ringing of the horses' hoofs.

* * * * *

About nine in the morning Karol came up the street, with a cutting wind in his teeth. A friend who had connections in the secret police department

had called on him late at night to warn him that Vladimir's case was being discussed there, and that a search, or some other unpleasantness, might be expected in a few days. "Nothing will happen to-night," he had said, so Karol had judged it best to put off coming till the morning. Unless someone among Vladimir's friends had been careless, he thought, there was little fear of anything more than a domiciliary search, a mere annoyance in the case of a person so scrupulous about destroying every scrap of paper. But the sooner the warning was given the better.

As Karol entered from the street, the porter, scraping the slippery pavement, looked up and asked him sharply: "Where are you going?"

It was the first time the question had been put, and Karol glanced round at him with keen eyes.

In the courtyard the tracks of the sledge had been effaced by fresh snow, but the doorstep showed the marks of many feet. He passed a ground-floor window opening on to the court, and saw the blind raised a little and a scared face peering out at him. Then it vanished. At the foot of the stairs lay a crumpled white thing. It was a man's pocket-handkerchief, and the stain upon the linen told him whose it was before he stooped to pick it up; but he spread it out slowly in his hands and read the embroidered initials.

Under the first shock of the blow, his mind went back mechanically to the habits of its early Catholic training. He put up a hand and crossed himself, whispering, after the fashion of his people:

"Jesus! Mary!"

Then he stepped quickly into the shadow of the doorway; and, as was his wont in emergencies, paused for a moment to run over the situation in his mind, taking in all its aspects with the swift clearness of long habit.

It would be worse than useless for him to go upstairs now. The police would be in possession of the rooms; and he, as an old suspect, would certainly be arrested on entering. Having no connection with the case, he would very likely be released again in a few weeks, but his one chance of helping Olive would be gone by then. He must find out first of all where she was.

Turning to leave the courtyard, he saw the blind of the same window raised again. This time a hand beckoned to him, and a moment later the porter's wife, red-eyed with crying, opened a side-door.

"Doctor, come in here a minute, please. You know what has happened?"

"I see."

"They're upstairs. They let me take the young lady into my room. I don't know what to do with her. I can't get her to move; she's like an image."

He found Olive in the little, close, dark room; a stone figure with open eyes. He spoke to her in English, calling her name softly, but there was no answer. Her eyelids fluttered a little, then the face stiffened and was stone once more.

"Wake up!" he said, and shook her by the arm.
"Wake up! you have work to do."

CHAPTER IX

"I'LL wait for you here," Karol said, pausing on the bridge over the frozen canal. "It's that door where the sentinel is standing."

Olive looked up at him. It was all only a few hours ago, and her eyes were still helpless and vague.

"Can't you come in with me? Must I go alone?"

She began to tremble, and Karol's hand clenched itself in the pocket of his fur coat. Few things in life had seemed to him harder than this sending her in there alone. He knew so well what it would be like.

"It's better not," he said gently. "I should only take away what little chance you have. You see, they know me."

"But have I any chance?"

"Your being a foreigner is in your favour. I don't think they'll let you see him, but they may pass a letter through. Ask to see the Director himself, and don't let anyone else talk to you, if you can help it. And remember what I told you."

She answered like a child repeating a lesson:

"I remember: if anyone insults me, to take no notice."

She left him standing on the bridge, and walked along the quay to the house with the open door and the inscription : "Central Department of State Police."

"Can I see His Excellency the Director?"

After stating her name and business, she was taken into a long wide corridor with benches against the wall.

"Wait there ; you will be called into the audience-room when your turn comes."

She sat waiting for more than an hour. Several rooms opened directly from the corridor ; there were also passages leading to other parts of the building ; and a continual stream of figures in uniform passed in and out, hurrying, lounging, gossiping, rustling papers and slamming doors. Petitioners waiting their turn sat in a long row on the benches, some whispering together, a few talking excitedly, others quite silent. Beside Olive sat a poverty-stricken woman with a child leaning against her knees. From time to time a few tears trickled down her cheeks, and were brushed away mechanically by the rusty black sleeve of her jacket. Every few minutes the door of the audience-room at the further end would open, one petitioner would come out, and another be called in. Most of them followed their guide with a flurried manner and an expression timid, furtive or anxious ; a few wore a stolid look of indifference.

The door nearest to Olive opened a little, and a voice called in French : "Alexis, come out and have a smoke ; I'm bored to death."

Two young officers of gendarmerie came out into the corridor. The one addressed as Alexis was a vacuous creature whose heavy features contrasted oddly with the daintiness of his blue and silver uniform. The other belonged to the type that gains quick promotion by the favour of ladies at Court. He was slender and graceful; a southern Pole, with a handsome face that was beginning to show faint, ugly signs round the mouth and eyes, and silky dark curls, already growing thin. Both affected an elaborate elegance; a scent of heliotrope trailed behind them, and as they strolled along the corridor, chatting lazily, their figures showed the lines of stays.

"Oh, you and your Masha!" the handsome one said, lighting his cigarette and tossing the match at a petitioner's feet. "Every fat market-wife is a beauty to you."

They passed on, smoking. A little wizened old man, gorgeous with silver galloon, came out from the room and hobbled down the corridor. Presently the two subalterns sauntered back. The handsome one stopped short in front of Olive.

"That's not a bad-looking girl, if she knew how to dress; your Moscow prize pigs don't hold their heads that way. General, come and look at this girl's hair."

The little old man limped up to them, and peered under the brim of Olive's fur hat, holding his cigar delicately in a jewelled, withered hand. The smoke rose in a blue line, and broke against her cheek. She sat still, her clenched hands tightening slowly in her lap.

"I should have liked a touch more red in it," he said; "and brown eyes. These gray-eyed women are as cold as fishes; they haven't an ounce of temperament."

The conversation drifted into detail, with illustrative anecdotes. Fortunately, Olive was not sufficiently familiar with the mixed Russian and French jargon that they spoke to understand quite everything. Presently they moved on and left her alone.

"They're calling you," said the woman in the black jacket, turning dull eyes towards her languidly. "You'll lose your turn."

It was only when she stood up that she found herself all stiff and cold. She unclenched her hands, and rubbed the damp from them with her handkerchief. Somehow she had not realized that it had hurt so much as that.

She followed her guide into the audience-room.

"Olive Latham, a British subject. Petition: for information concerning Vladimir Ivanovich Damarov, prisoner of State. . . ."

His Excellency lifted a hand, and the droning voice stopped.

"What is your connection with the prisoner?"

"I am betrothed to him, your Excellency."

"And what is it you want?"

"To know where he is; and to see him if possible."

"Prisoners are not allowed to see visitors during the first period of detention. In four weeks . . ."

"He is dying, your Excellency."

The Director turned to his secretary. "Is there any special report on this case?"

The secretary handed him a paper. He glanced over it, and said without looking up :

"Come again to-morrow."

She moved a step nearer.

"Your Excellency, he may be dead by then. If I can't see him, may I write? If he could have just one line. . . ."

"Come again to-morrow," the Director repeated ; and added over his shoulder : "The next petition."

Everything was suddenly blurred with red.

"May I send a message? Tell me where he is, at least. . . . Your Excellency . . . but you don't understand—he's dying."

Someone touched her on the shoulder. "His Excellency is engaged."

She was in the corridor again, and the door of the audience-room had shut behind her.

She went out into the street. The sentinel looked after her with vague curiosity ; he had seen other faces wear that look. As she walked along the quay with her even tread, the holiday crowd on the pavement stepped aside to let her pass. On the bridge Karol came forward and drew her arm through his. She neither spoke nor looked up.

For some time they walked in silence ; then she turned her head and looked at him. Assuredly she was past the help of any man's sympathy ; but there was more than sympathy in Karol's steady eyes, and the tense lines about her mouth relaxed a little. She looked round her at the quay, the canal, the passers-by ; then back into Karol's face.

"I have failed."

"I know," he answered tenderly. "One generally fails."

They were silent again.

"After all," she said at last; "it doesn't make much difference."

The life faded out of her face, leaving a rigid mask.

"It can't be more than two or three days now, can it?"

"I think not."

They walked on, passing street after street. Carnival surged round them, with rattling and shouting, with capering and quarrelling, with red and yellow finery, with kissing and drink.

"There is just this about it," he said when they turned into a quieter street; "that you get the worst at the beginning. Our people have a saying that when once you're accustomed to these things, you can manage to stand them; the whole trick is to get accustomed."

She found herself laughing, and the sound of her own voice scared her, it was so thin and shrill.

"Have you ever tried—ever been a woman, for instance?"

"I've had a sister," he answered softly. "That's almost as bad sometimes."

She had never heard him mention his sister before. Now the story that Vladimir had told her sprang up in her memory, a naked spectre. Who was she, indeed, that she should make so much of the mere ruin of her personal life? Only one more in a long list. "There are so many of us," she thought; "so many . . ."

Her hand shook on Karol's arm.

"I forgot," she said; "I was a brute to remind you . . ."

He took the hand and held it with strong fingers.

"That's all right; I don't forget. Nor will you, but you'll get accustomed, like the rest of us, both to the big things and to the little ones. Take the dirt, for instance. When a new man comes into one of the provincial prisons, and sees the wall black with cockroaches and bugs, and the lice swarming all over his sleeping-bench, it nearly drives him mad at first, and then he gets accustomed. It's the same way with those male animals in there; you won't feel them after a bit."

Olive stopped short on the pavement. Everyone's secrets, it seemed, were an open book to him; but that he should have guessed the existence of this little wound brought a stifling lump into her throat. It would have killed her to speak of it, she thought; and he knew without any words.

"Karol . . ." She had never called him by his Christian name before. "Karol, how did you know . . ."

"My girl, you are not the first. Our women often have that to face if they are at all young and good to look at. I'm not sure it isn't harder for the men that love them and have to stand by and see. But try to remember that these half-developed creatures cannot understand; they are only doing after their kind."

She bent her head, ashamed in the presence of his broad and patient charity.

"Karol," she asked him timidly at last; "how long did it take you to . . . get accustomed?"

"Oh, not so long, my dear; two or three years make a wonderful difference."

"Two or . . . three . . . years. . . ." Her voice died away, and Karol's fingers tightened on her hand.

"And now," he said, after a moment's pause, "we will try the Gendarmerie. But you must have steady nerves for that."

"Wait a minute; let me think."

He walked beside her without speaking till she raised her head.

"I'm ready now."

"Hold up your hand first. Yes, that's quite steady."

He waited a long time outside the Central Department of Gendarmerie. When she came out her face was full of a pitiful, childish distress.

"I'm to come back in an hour. It's my own fault this time. I muddled somehow. . . . I understood I was to wait in the passage, and then they told me I ought to have gone through to the inner room. I've missed my turn."

"Oh, my God!" broke from the man.

Her eyes dilated.

"Is it . . . have I . . . lost my chance?"

"No, not that; but it looks as if they were going to chivy you."

He hesitated for an instant.

"You'd better understand the truth at once. It's a trick, don't you see? They do it sometimes with

anyone that is specially defenceless. Perhaps you offended one of them last night? Or it may be just because you are a foreigner and have no friends here but us."

She only said in a scared whisper: "I don't understand what you mean."

She understood before the day was over. The game went on without a break from morning till dusk. She was sent backwards and forwards; upstairs, downstairs, into rooms and out of them, along corridors, and corridors, and corridors again—an endless treadmill of corridors. From the Gendarmerie she was directed back to the Central Police, from there to the Department of Prisons, then to the Gendarmerie again. Here it was too early, there too late; this was the third room, and she must go to the fourth; that the fourth, and she should have stayed in the third. Some of the officials went through a solemn farce of mock explanations; others pushed past her roughly, or flung curt answers and turned their backs; others, again, laughed openly in her face; a few muttered something hurriedly and looked ashamed. When at last it ended with: "Too late now; come at ten to-morrow morning," she stumbled blindly to where Karol waited at the street-corner in the bitter wind, and clung to his arm, dazed and sick.

He took her to her lodgings, forced a little food upon her, and made her lie down. Then he left her, promising to come back early in the morning, and started off in search of news. He had some faint hope of finding out the truth informally through

private connections. Olive refused his offer to send a woman friend to stay the night with her.

"I would rather be alone," she said, and turned her face to the wall.

When he came in next morning, one glance showed him what the night had been. Her eyes already had the hunted look that he had been watching and dreading to see.

"I have not much news," he told her; "but I've found out where he is. They took him to the fortress."

"The prison in the river? Ah! . . ." She put her hand over her eyes, shuddering.

"It doesn't matter much, my dear. Whatever the conditions are, he won't feel them."

"Are you so sure of that?"

"I think, even if he is still alive, he can scarcely be conscious now."

She began to laugh. "You forget; I'm a sick-nurse, and pretty lies won't help me. He may live a week yet, and be conscious all the time."

"Not there," he said softly.

In the evening he brought her home to her lodgings again, this time in dead silence. He could already see the little signs of breaking down: the hands twitching in her lap, the film across her eyes; and this was only the second day. He sat beside her in the sledge with clenched teeth; he had known the game of chivying to go on merrily for a week or more. As for her, to the end of her life she would see hell as a labyrinth of white corridors, of false directions, of smiling faces.

"To-morrow morning," a suave official had said to her as she passed out with wide, blind eyes.

Karol left her at the street-door of the house where she lodged.

"Go in and lie down," he said. "Perhaps I may be able to get some news this evening. I'll come and see you later."

His fruitless search went on for hours. Coming back to her lodgings late at night, the big man stopped half-way up the stairs and leaned against the banisters, dizzy and aching with fatigue. He was so tired that for one moment his courage failed him at the thought of telling her that he had still no news. But it must be done; she would sit up waiting all night if he did not come. He stumbled two or three times on the way up, catching his feet against the steps, and paused again at the top to leave off trembling.

"The lady is out," the sleepy maid-servant told him. "She has not been home since she went out with you in the morning."

Karol went down the stairs again, and stood for a moment on the doorstep, thinking. It was just possible that she herself had been arrested in the moment of entering the house, but that was so unlikely that he put the thought aside. Probably she was wandering about the streets. If so, she would be sure to find her way, sooner or later, towards the fortress.

A sudden fear brought the sweat out on the palms of his hands. She might have strayed to the park on the landward side of the fortress. A lonely place,

infested after dark by criminals and prowlers, it was dangerous enough for a woman alone on any night in the year; but in carnival time . . . He hailed the first sledge, drove at a tearing pace across the bridge, and searched the alleys of the park and the black lines of the fortifications and shut gateway. Close to him the bells of the spire jangled their eternal chant: "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!"

He gave up the search in the park, and recrossed the bridge to look for her on the palace quay, opposite the water-gate of the fortress. On the open quay the wind was very bitter, and snow dashed in his face as he drove. Below the granite wall of the embankment the frozen river lay as dead under a pall of black sky.

He found her crouching away from the wind in a niche of the parapet, staring across the broad expanse of ice. From the water-gate on the opposite side the twin lights known as "the wolf's eyes" stared back at her with a steady and unwinking gleam.

He left the sledge waiting at a little distance. Her shrinking movement at the sound of his footsteps showed him that he was not the first man who had approached her that night.

"Olive, come home."

She turned with a cry, and clung to him, panic-stricken, desperate, gasping for breath.

"Karol, Karol—oh, Karol!"

"Come home," he said, and put his arms round her. "Poor child! come home."

But she shrank away again.

"No, no, I can't; I daren't!"

She seemed half paralyzed with cold; he could scarcely understand her speech.

"I have tried . . . so many times . . . The stairs . . . they're all dark . . . I can't go in. . . . Karol, I shall see ghosts—I shall see ghosts!"

"Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!" the piercing jangle of the fortress bells repeated; and, with a false leading-note from one cracked bell, went on to the hourly hymn-tune: "How glorious is our Lord in Sion!"

Karol beckoned to the sledge-driver.

"I'll take you to my place; you shan't see ghosts there. Get in."

She obeyed passively, turning her head to look back at the wolf's eyes. The harsh chime still beat against her ears: "How glorious is our Lord in Sion!"

She seemed scarcely conscious, and lay with her head on his shoulder most of the way. Arrived at his lodgings, he waked the people of the house, and set them to make tea and heat food. Then he took off her wraps, laid her on his bed, and chafed her feet and hands. Very soon her frozen stupor passed into sleep. He remained sitting by the bed, too tired to move.

She sprang up screaming, with both hands over her eyes.

"Ah, the snow—the snow!"

He caught her in his arms and held her close to him.

"Karol, he called me! I heard him call me! They're stifling him with snow! . . ."

"Hush, hush! lie down! He doesn't feel it now."

It was impossible to quiet her; she paced the room like a caged thing. Presently she began to laugh.

"They told me to-day there was nothing serious against him, and he would probably soon be released . . . soon be . . ."

"Sit down," Karol interrupted. He had crossed the room and was unlocking a cupboard.

She obeyed, with a frightened whisper: "You're not . . . going out?"

"Of course not; I promised you I wouldn't leave you."

He came back with a hypodermic needle; and, stooping over her shoulder, lifted her right hand and injected morphia into the wrist. When her head dropped on to the table he lifted her in his arms and laid her on the bed; then sat down beside the pillow and watched her as she slept.

Such as it was, this night was all he would have of his own to go on living with. To her, it would remain a vague blur of horror; as for him, when it was over his personal life would be over too. Still, he had probably saved her from some local hospital or madhouse; and for the rest, there was his work. He had that, at least; so long as he could do it, there was always his work to do.

The window-panes rattled faintly; from long distance came a jangling of bells: "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!"

He dropped his head suddenly on to the girl's unconscious hand ; his shoulders heaved a little.

* * * * *

When she woke in the morning he was making coffee. She stared at him vacantly ; then remembered and tried to jump up, but fell back with both hands to her temples.

"No hurry ; it's early yet," he said, looking round with a nod and smile. "Your head will be better when you've had a cup of coffee."

She sat up, slowly and painfully.

"Oh, I've kept you up all night ! Why did you let me do it ? You've had no sleep."

"I ? My dear, I slept like a top, there on the chair. Do you want to get up now ? The clean towels are here, and there's the warm water. I'll go and have a smoke."

When she called him he came in with an official-looking blue paper in his hand. His face darkened as he read it.

"Would your father come if you telegraphed for him ?" he asked after stirring his coffee for a long time in silence.

"My father ? I wouldn't bring him here for the world."

"Is there anyone else ? I can't leave you here alone, and I have to go away to-morrow."

Her hands fell. "You are going away ?"

"I have no choice but to go or be taken by force. My permit is up, and I applied to the police for a few days' grace. This is a refusal ; they give me till the morning train to-morrow."

She rose and began to put on her wraps. "It's time to start now; as for to-morrow, if you must go you must, but I don't want anyone else."

"We will discuss that later. By the way, the porter has your travelling-pass ready when you want it. You have only to sign."

"But they changed my passport for another paper when I got here."

"Yes, for as long as you stay. You can't cross the frontier without having your English passport back and a permit from the authorities. I made an application in your name the day before yesterday."

"But I can't go yet. I can't leave here till . . ."

Her voice came to a little quiver, and stopped.

"I know that; but when you do want to go you might have to wait for permission, so I got it done quickly through friends. If you don't use it this week you have only to make another application. And here is money for the journey, and a little English gold to take you through; if you want to leave in a hurry after I go you mayn't have time to get it from the bank."

"Karol, do you always think of everything for everyone?"

She lifted her eyes to his face, and saw the mouth twitch for an instant before it settled into the old uncompromising line.

"Not for everyone," he said, and took up his hat.

His Excellency was engaged, she was told on asking to see the Director of Police; but the same secretary she spoke to yesterday would see her.

He looked up smiling as she entered the room, and she grew cold with dread. She had cause enough to remember him already, but this was the first time that she saw him smile.

"Let me see ; you come about . . . ?"

"Vladimir Damarov."

"Ah yes, of course. Not a relative, I think ? Engaged to him, if I remember rightly ?"

"Yes."

He shook his head compassionately.

"Dear, dear ! And couldn't you find a better sweetheart than that, a handsome girl like you ?"

Karol was right, it seemed ; one could get accustomed. This time she scarcely winced.

"He doesn't seem to care much about you, anyway," the secretary went on. "I saw him last night, and he was quite indifferent."

She stood still and looked at him. He leaned back in his chair, stroking his moustache with slow enjoyment.

"Quite indifferent, I assure you. Perhaps you had better find another sweetheart. Good-morning."

In the corridor two officers in blue and silver stood talking. One of them looked round as she passed, then came after her.

"Is it you that have been inquiring about Damarov ?"

"Yes."

"And those . . . " he jerked his head towards the secretary's room. "They've been telling you lies in there, eh ?"

She was silent. He dropped his voice.

"Don't let them fool you. He died yesterday. I'm . . . sorry for you."

He went back to his companion.

* * * * *

"Of course," she said to Karol, as he stooped to unfasten her cloak; "it may be true. But what proof have I?"

They had walked back to her lodgings in silence. He knelt down and took off her overshoes before answering.

"What was the man like who spoke to you in the corridor?"

"I didn't notice much. A big man with a reddish moustache going gray."

"With a hooked nose and a colonel's uniform?"

"I think so."

"That is Petrov. He's all right; about the most decent man they have there. Then it's true."

"Perhaps, but it may be a joke. There have been so many jokes."

He could not shake her passive, stubborn, hopeless disbelief. To all that he said she answered, over and over again: "How can I know it's not another joke?"

"Will it help you if I bring you proof?" he said at last.

"Proof? What proof?"

"I am not sure, mind; my time is so short. But if I can find a man—not one of these, but a decent man—who actually saw him dead . . ."

She whispered to herself, twisting her fingers together: "If I could know he is dead . . . if I could know . . ."

"I will try," Karol said. "Wait here for me; I may be gone some time."

He came back in the afternoon, and found her sitting where he had left her, looking down at the thin clasped hands in her lap. She raised her eyes as he came in and let them fall again.

"Put on your warmest clothes and come out with me."

She obeyed, asking no questions. They sat for a long time in a dirty, crowded tram, among work-people in holiday dress, and were set down at last in a factory suburb by the river-side. The place was riotous with dancing and horseplay; hawkers thrust sweetmeats, toys, and gaudy ribbons in their faces as they walked. Rival sledges, racing, overladen with men, women, and children clinging, laughing, shrieking together, passed with a wild, swaying rush, scattering the crowd to left and right. The drivers, standing up, their long whips circling overhead, urged on their horses with yells which the crowd took up and echoed in chorus. Carnival was degenerating into a drunken orgie.

Further on, where the houses left off, the road was quiet. On one side was the low, uneven bank, with a few stunted willows crouched beside the broad, still, ice-bound river. On the other was a cemetery wall, and beyond that a waste of unreclaimed swamp. Here and there gaunt companies of huddled bushes cowered, naked to the wind and rattling barren twigs.

A pale crescent moon came up in front ; behind, the distant city lay under a red and smoky sunset.

They left the road a little way beyond the cemetery, where a track of footprints crossed the snow to the starved and scattered brushwood. Karol, still silent, led the way from track to track, from clump to clump ; and the girl followed like a sleep-walker.

They had described a wide half-circle through the swamp, and now approached the cemetery on the side furthest from the road. A ditch, with an earthen dyke thrown up behind it, marked the boundary of the consecrated ground. Within the enclosure stretched long rows of open, empty graves ; oblong pits dug wholesale beforehand and waiting, half-choked with snow, for future tenants. The frozen mud was piled up between in even heaps, ready to be shovelled down. The further ends of the rows were already occupied, and little wooden crosses, all of the same pattern, stood at the heads. This was the military cemetery, and the rows were numbered according to companies. Here and there a taller cross marked the grave of a corporal or sergeant. Further in was the pauper burying-ground ; a jumble of shallow graves, carelessly scooped in the mud, and crosses made from scraps of deal board nailed together, rotting and falling awry. In the distance the tombstones and gaudy chapel of the privileged dead gleamed white in the gathering dusk.

A man came out from behind a clump of dwarf willows. The girl looked round as he approached them, and shuddered faintly at the sight of the blue uniform. Karol went up to him.

"I am very grateful to you for coming. It's quite safe; there's no one about. This is the woman he was to have married. Tell her what you can."

The gendarme cast a furtive glance at her and looked down again, crunching a clod of ice under his boot. He was quite young, with a large meek face and watery blue, round, frightened eyes.

"I was on night duty in the corridor, lady," he began in the broad, mouthing speech of the Volga provinces, and stopped.

"In the fortress, when they brought him in?" Karol said.

"May it please your honour, it was nearly morning. Yes, I saw him carried down the corridor. He turned his head round and looked at me. He didn't say anything. They put him in the third cell."

"Alone?"

"Alone, lady. He was quite quiet. I didn't hear a sound all the morning, except that he coughed sometimes. Only when Vassilych carried in the dinner I heard him say something very softly."

"Is Vassilych the warder?"

"He was on duty, taking the food round. He came out very angry and said to me: 'It's a sin to waste good cabbage soup like that, putting it down by a half-dead man that never even looks at it. I'd be glad of it myself,' he said . . ."

"Was Vassilych the only person who went in?"

"The head-warder went in last thing at night, your honour, with the doctor; but they came out again directly. I heard the doctor say: 'What's

the use? He can't last till morning.' He did though."

"How long did he live?"

"Till the next afternoon; that's yesterday. I was on night duty again. I had eight hours off after dinner, you understand. So when I came on again in the evening I heard him begin to moan and talk to himself. I couldn't make out what he said. He made a scratching noise in his throat in the night, and once I heard him say: 'Water.' Then Osip came on again at six in the morning, and I went off duty."

"Was Osip on duty all yesterday?"

"Yes, your honour. He's here in the village now; we both have the day off, because of carnival. He went and got drunk first thing; he said to me: 'A man must get drunk in our work, else there's no standing it.' He said: 'I can hear that moaning now, and: "Water! water! water! for God's sake!"' Osip was always tender-hearted."

"Did he take any water in?"

"Lady, who would dare to go in? It's against orders."

"That will do, I think," Karol said, and put a hand on Olive's shoulder. "Haven't you heard enough, my dear?"

"Let me alone; I must know everything. Then he died yesterday afternoon, while you were off duty?"

"Yes, lady. Osip said he heard it get softer and softer; and then a noise like sawing wood, he said; and then it was quiet. So in the night we were sent

in to fetch the body. We were given a box to put him in—no, not a coffin, a big deal box. Then we came out by the water-gate—that would be about two in the night—and brought him down here.”

“Is he buried here? Can I see the grave?”

He looked at her in a timid, sidelong way.

“It’s . . . not what you might call a grave, lady; not a Christian grave. Yes, I’ll show you.”

Just outside the consecrated enclosure a few clods had a broken look. A little snow had been stamped in to hide the marks of the pickaxe. The man stopped, and, seeing Karol bareheaded, pulled off his own cap; then knelt down and felt about with his hands in the snow.

“Here it is.”

He uncovered the head of a wooden stake driven into the ground.

“They put that so as not to dig again in the same place,” Karol explained softly.

“It’s a bit shallow,” the man said, scrambling awkwardly to his feet. “We had a job to make the hole at all; everything’s frozen so hard.”

Olive stood looking at him across the broken clods.

“Are you sure he was dead before you put him in the hole?”

He gave a little gasp, looked from her to Karol, and back again to her; then raised an unsteady hand and crossed himself.

“Christ be with you, lady! Did you think we would bury a live man?”

“How should I know?” she answered in the same soundless, even voice.

Karol touched the sleeve of the blue uniform.

"You saw his face? Tell her."

"Yes, I saw . . ." He shivered. "He . . . had struggled. There was blood on his shirt. He was quite cold."

"There, that will do," Karol said. "Go back by the ditch, and we'll go round the other way; it's safer so. Good-bye, and thank you."

The man crossed himself again and went away, leaving them standing by the grave. It was growing dark. After some time Karol touched her on the arm.

"Come."

They walked back through the willow scrub.

"There's one thing that you will find good to remember," he said. "Whatever has been, he is dead; and there is nothing more that they can do. That's poor comfort, but I was glad of it after my sister died."

She turned her head slowly and looked into his eyes.

"And I am glad. But are you quite sure he was dead before they put him down there?"

"Quite sure, my dear."

* * * * *

She left for England by the night express. It was the only opportunity for Karol to see her safely out of the town before his own forced departure in the morning. It was he who packed her luggage, settled her bills, and took her ticket. She remained absolutely passive, eating, dressing, moving when he told

her to, and breaking silence only to ask from time to time, always in the same still way: "Are you quite sure he was dead before . . .?"

"Quite sure," he would answer.

She asked him the same thing again as he stooped to put the rug about her feet in the railway-carriage.

"Quite sure," he said once more.

A bell rang; a voice called: "Take your seats!" He jumped out, and the door was locked.

"That was the second bell; they'll start in a moment. I have telegraphed to your people to meet you at Dover."

"Karol . . ."

She raised a hand to her forehead, trying to remember something. He put his foot on the step and leaned in at the window.

"Yes?"

It was the same question, the only one on earth that mattered to her at all.

"Are you quite sure he was dead before they put him in the hole?"

He answered with the same tireless patience:

"Quite sure, my dear."

The third bell rang. He stretched a hand to her.

"Good-bye. I will come to England and see you when I can."

Her eyes looked out beyond him with a fixed, unchanging stare. The train began to move. When it was out of sight he turned to walk back along the platform, and stopped short with both hands at his throat. A porter came up to him.

"Are you ill, sir? Can I . . ."

"Get me . . . brandy," Karol whispered. He was choking like a hysterical schoolgirl.

The man ran off to the refreshment-bar; and Karol, following him blindly, stumbled against a passer-by, who first looked round, annoyed, then held out his hand with an exclamation of surprise.

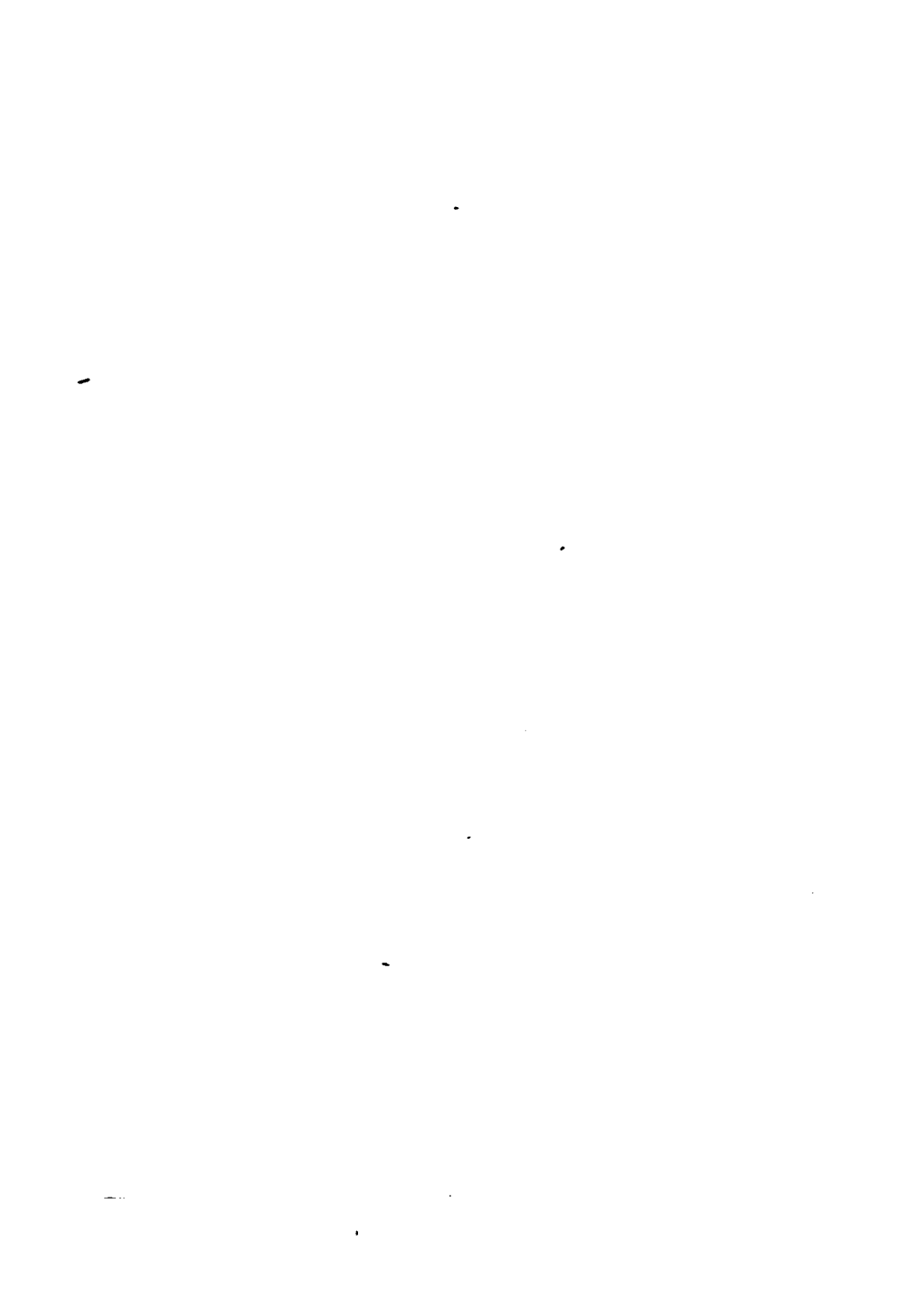
"Dr. Slavinski! Why, who would have . . ."

Karol shoved him savagely aside.

"Go to the devil!" he said. "I want a drink."

END OF PART I

PART II



CHAPTER I

IT was Dick Grey who met Olive on Dover Pier. Her father had an engagement, and Dick, by this time a family friend, offered himself as a substitute.

When she came up the gangway he hurried through the crowd to meet her; then broke off in the middle of his first cheerful greeting, and stood looking at her. She seemed not to notice the change in his manner, but mechanically let him take her bag and conduct her to the train.

He waited a long time before daring to speak otherwise than of necessary trifles. At last he put down his newspaper and leaned across to her. The train was running through bare hopfields, and she sat looking out over them, quite still.

"Olive, is he . . ."

"Dead," she answered without moving; and he had instinct enough to ask no more.

Her own people were less tactful. They mercifully refrained from questioning her; but even questions could hardly have been worse than the blank surprise in her father's face at sight of her, the growing horror as she approached him, the sudden, sharp cry: "Good God, it's Olive!" the attempt to

redeem appearances: "You quite startled us, my dear; we expected you by the later train." Jenny, for her part, stared for a moment, then burst out crying and ran from the room; and the mother's face was worst of all.

Their first impression was that she must be dying of a wasting disease, or have caught some pernicious malarial fever. They pressed her to see a doctor. She refused at first, protesting wearily that there was nothing the matter with her; but when they persisted she gave way, to save the trouble of further discussion, and let her father bring her to London to a Harley Street consultant.

"A bad case of anæmia and nervous breakdown," the doctor said. "There is nothing else the matter with her. Probably she has had a shock, or has something on her mind."

"But look at her!" Mrs. Latham cried out, when she was told the verdict. "She's wasted to a skeleton; her lips are like parchment; the colour is all gone out of her hair. How can he say it's only that!"

Unhappily, it was only that. Had the girl been by nature less strong and healthy, she might perhaps have had a bad illness, which would have brought her the one relief possible: an interruption in the continuity of her daily life. But her body was too sound for that, and nothing happened beyond a gradual and apparently hopeless general breakdown. She was, as her mother had put it: "wasted to a skeleton," and grew, in spite of all their care, steadily thinner. Within three months she had become so

weak that to walk down the garden would set her panting for breath, and her heart would thump unevenly at the exertion of mounting half a flight of stairs. She suffered fearfully from sleeplessness, from atrocious headaches, from nightmares and fits of shivering; otherwise there was nothing at all the matter with her.

During the first months no question as to the future was raised in the house, nor did the girl herself trouble to think of it. She had come back partly at the bidding of some blind homing instinct, partly because Karol had told her to do so, and because she had not enough interest in life to disobey. Being at home, she stayed there passively, and accepted, or endured, the thousand little things in which her mother's love expressed itself; the beef-tea and malt extract, the timid caresses; with a dull and stolid indifference.

Indeed, she had become indifferent to all things, even to the memory of her dead lover. Some day, perhaps, she might begin to feel her loss; but as yet she felt only the furious aching in the back of her head, and the wheels that raced round and round and would not stop through hour after hour of interminable sleepless nights.

If she could sleep, she told herself at first, nothing would matter. It was only this hideous lying awake that made her so frightened when the dusk came, so heavy and cold by day. She would be her own self again if only she could sleep. Before the spring was over she had begun to assure herself that all would be well if only she could keep awake.

At the worst, the waking mind can fight in its own defence, can call out such will-power as nature has given; but when asleep, what can one do? She stood appalled at the injustice, the underhand treachery of this universal need for sleep, which she now saw for the first time as a trap laid to catch the most wary. Plan out your life, your thoughts, your actions how you will, discipline your nature to follow as a dog at the heels of your reason; some time you must sleep, and be delivered over, gagged and tied, to the machine in your head that will not leave off fashioning images.

But for these nightmare images she could surely have managed, somehow, to forget. They trooped past in endless chains: images of ice and swamp and blinding snow, of digging in the frozen mud to find out whether he had struggled, whether he was really dead before they put him in the hole; images of laughing faces, of satisfied red mouths that whispered obscenities; images of corridors, of corridors, of never-ending whitewashed corridors. Sometimes, lost among the corridors, she wandered all night long, guided only by a thin voice calling from the distance: "Water! water! water!" Sometimes the same cry would come up, very faintly, from under broken clods of ice, while she slipped and stumbled between graves, and, stretching out her hands for help in the darkness, struck them against the heads of wooden stakes.

Often her mother or sister, roused at night, would run into her room, and find her sleeping with wide-open eyes and whispering hurriedly things that they

could not understand. But when awaked she would say: "A nightmare," and would lie down as if to sleep again, though her eyes were wild with fear. By day she was mostly taciturn, but sometimes over-talkative, chattering restlessly of trifles, laughing over small, stale jokes; yet neither mood made any difference to her ferocious reserve. And her people understood nothing; indeed, had she told them all, they still would not have understood.

To Jenny, the pet child of the household, the home-coming of this changeling sister was the first shock of real and grievous disappointment which she had ever known. During the past half-year she had reached that stage of development at which an innocently vain and thoughtless girl becomes suddenly impressed with a sense of her duty; and, being of a malleable and imitative nature, she had been earnestly trying to model herself upon the absent elder sister. "I shall never be as clever as Olive is," she had told her mother; "but I will try to be as good." The resolution was, no doubt, partly inspired by the new curate, whose influence over her was a steadily growing one; but it was none the less sincere, and the girl had stuck to it bravely, refusing many pleasures in order to wait upon her mother, and consoling herself for lost dances and flirtations by the thought that Olive would come home and be pleased that she had "been so good." Now there had come home, not Olive, but a hollow-cheeked and hard-eyed ghost; and little Jenny, recognising mournfully that it seemed to make no difference whether one was good or not, stared through a mist

of unintelligible horror at the first human tragedy that had crossed her path.

Disappointment and perplexity drew her and the mother nearer together than they had ever been before, and further away from Olive. In Mrs. Latham's sheltered life there was no room for shipwrecks. Household cares and worries were familiar to her; ill-health and mild religious doubts she had borne in patience for eighteen years; and that was all. Since her one real sorrow, the death of the boy, her life had flowed through quiet places, a melancholy, placid stream of little griefs and little duties, regular, inevitable as the seasons. At first merely resigned, she had ended by growing accustomed to her narrow existence. Now the outer darkness had come into this world of gray and tempered shadow; a darkness that might be felt. Within a month of Olive's return the mother had begun to watch her furtively, askance, and to cling unconsciously to the younger daughter, as though this one only were her flesh and blood and that an alien.

Yet there was no want of tenderness on either her part or Jenny's. Had the girl come back to them with any lesser trouble, such as might be talked of, wept over, consoled, they would have grieved for her sorrow as if it had been their own, and have loved her the better because of their grief. But Olive came back with shut lips and held her peace.

As for the father, he also held his peace. Of all the household, he alone understood, in a dim, groping way, a very little. What the thing could be that had

changed the daughter he had been so proud of into this haggard stranger, he could not even dimly guess; but the hunted look in her eyes warned him to let her alone, to ask no questions, to offer no sympathy; and his reticence won for him in time a certain negative reward. Though the hope he clung to, that some day she would give him her voluntary confidence, gradually faded out, still, he had gained something: she avoided him less than she did the others. "She seems not to shrink quite so much from me as from her mother and sister," he told the family doctor with a piteous hesitation in affirming even this; "but it may be only that, as I don't worry her, she forgets my existence."

Perhaps if all the persons who surrounded her had allowed her to forget their existence, she would not have become so frightened and confused. The half-reproachful, half-scared expression of Jenny's pretty eyes; the mother's anxious face and eager, shy caresses; the air of unspoken sympathy with which Dick hovered about; the pitying looks of the village folk; all alike seemed to her a cruel and harassing importunity. "Why can't they let me alone?" she would whisper to herself, panting and fierce under the goad of some kindly-meant expression of concern; "oh, why can't they let me alone?"

Her sensibility seemed to have become a thing merely of the surface. While the tips of her nerves responded with unendurable keenness of distress to the lightest external touch, all underneath was callous and indifferent. A death in her family would scarcely have troubled her; a tactless word drove her

to the verge of desperation. The same disproportionate sensitiveness in trifles tormented her physically. Once when her mother, passing the sofa where she now spent most of her time, stooped down to put a shawl about her, the girl cried out sharply, as if hurt. She lifted her arm, and the loose sleeve she wore fell back, showing where the soft touch of her mother's fingers had left upon the skin a red mark, like a burn.

One afternoon in May Mr. Latham, coming home from business, found his wife waiting for him in the porch.

"Come in softly, Alfred," she said. "Olive is on the drawing-room sofa; I've just got her off to sleep. We have had an awful day with her."

"Another headache?"

Olive was always late in the mornings now, and he had not seen her before leaving home.

"Yes, a terrible one. I found her pacing up and down her room this morning, almost light-headed with it. I sent for Dr. Morton."

"Has he been?"

"Yes. He gave her something to stop it for the moment, but he says he can't really do anything. He only repeats what the Harley Street man said: that she's brooding over something, and would get better if she could bring herself to speak of it. Alfred, can't you get her to tell you? If we could only know . . ."

"It's no use our discussing that again, Mary; we daren't worry her with cross-examinations now. Some day, perhaps, she'll tell us."

"She won't; she'll die. Come in and look at her; she's fast asleep. I didn't realize till to-day how thin she has grown."

He entered the room in felt slippers, and stooped over her, holding his breath. Her dressing-gown had fallen open, showing the wasted throat and wrists. Her face, as she slept, had the pinched features of a corpse. He turned away softly, and walked to the window.

"Good God!" he said under his breath.

His wife came and stood beside him, slipping a hand into his.

"Alfred, she'll die."

He made no answer.

"Look!" she whispered. "The telegraph boy; he'll wake her!"

Mr. Latham opened the window.

"Don't knock. Boy . . ."

But the boy had not heard; he gave a sharp double knock at the front-door, and Olive sprang from her sofa with a scream that pealed through the house.

"Ah, gendarmes . . . !"

Then she awoke to full consciousness, and saw her father and mother. No explanation was asked or offered; she went to her room without a word, and they stood where she had left them, avoiding one another's eyes.

The next day Mrs. Latham found her alone, lying on her deck-chair on the lawn; and, coming up behind her softly, put both arms about her neck.

"Don't, mother," the girl said, shrinking from the caress; "you hurt me."

Mrs. Latham drew her arms away; she had learned to accept as a mysterious fact this unnatural sensitiveness to touch. Olive's hand was lying on the arm of the chair; and the mother stood watching how the tiny hairs along the wrist would rise up suddenly and stand erect as if with cold or fear, then lie flat for a moment and rise again.

"Olive, child," she said at last; "can't you tell me what is wrong with you?"

"I have told you, mother; there's nothing. I'm tired and not very well, that is all."

Mrs. Latham looked down at the daisies.

"You see, dear, we . . . couldn't help hearing what you said yesterday when the boy waked you. . . ."

Olive's mouth set in an ominous line.

"I said nothing."

"Dear child, I don't want to force your confidence. But try to realize what your father and I must feel, hearing such a word as that and nothing more. If you could only tell us . . ."

There she broke off. Olive had risen from her deck-chair, and now stood looking at her, silent, with compressed lips.

"So you watch to see if I talk in my sleep? I'm glad you have told me, anyway. If I'm living among spies, it's as well to know it."

"Olive!" Mrs. Latham gasped. In the whole of her life such words had never been said to her till now, when she heard them from her own child.

Olive, with a curious glitter in her eyes, stood looking at her for a moment, then went slowly into the house. When Mr. Latham came home, he found his wife sobbing inconsolably, and drew the story from her bit by bit. His face grew white as he listened ; brutality of this kind was so foreign to Olive's nature as to give a definite shape to the vague fears that tormented him.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In her own room. Alfred, don't speak about it to her. It was my own fault ; you had warned me not to ask her questions."

Without answering, he went upstairs and knocked at Olive's door. He found her sitting by the window, as usually, alone. She never even looked up to see who had entered.

"Is your head bad again, my dear?"

"No."

"Did you sleep last night?"

"Not worse than other nights."

"I want to speak to you for a minute if you feel well enough."

"Yes?"

She had still not moved. He sat down beside her and took her hand ; but she drew it away, remaining otherwise quite passive. Her fingers slid through his like little sticks of ice.

"I have just found your mother in tears," he began. "She has been very much upset by her talk with you this afternoon. She blames herself for irritating you ; but . . . she is your mother, Olive, and, you know, she is not strong."

Olive sat looking down at the tightly-clenched, cold hands in her lap, and made no sign.

"Don't you think," he ventured at last, "that you are just a bit . . . cruel? God knows I don't want to pry into your secrets, child; but . . ."

"But you don't understand how I can be such a brute as to make mother cry? Nor do I. I suppose the glands that secrete daughterly feelings have got dried up in me, or their tissues have degenerated, or something. What's the use of being dishonest about it and pretending to care for you all when I can't care a bit? I behaved abominably to mother, of course; but I'd let her alone if she'd let me alone."

"Isn't that a hard thing to ask of people who care about you, whether you care for them or not, when they see you ridden by nightmares like this? Is there nothing I can do to help you against this fear? I would try to understand."

Olive slowly rose and set her back against the wall. She looked, her father thought with a pang of remorse, like a thing chivied from its hiding-place and turning helplessly at bay.

"Father," she said; "I came back here because I had nowhere else to go. Won't you let me stay and rest a little while? I shan't trouble you long. I haven't asked very much of you or mother in my life, have I? But if you ask me questions I shall have to go away."

"To go . . . away? What, back there?"

"Anywhere; to the first ditch, if I can't get further, and starve there, rather than be driven mad

with questions. Oh, why can't you leave me alone, all of you? Whichever way I turn, there are people asking questions, always asking questions. Can't you see it chokes me? I can't . . . breathe . . ."

Her voice broke off in a hoarse, struggling cry. She put up both hands and plucked at her collar. When, at her father's loud and frightened call, the women of the household came running to the room, they found her speechless, gasping like a person choking to death. None of them knew how to cope with a paroxysm so violent; but very soon the spasmodic contraction of the throat relaxed, and the attack passed over, leaving her utterly exhausted. Then she began to sob from sheer weakness, and, clinging to her father's hand, repeated, over and over again: "Promise you won't ask me questions! Tell them never to ask me questions!"

He kissed her, sighing, and went away. He had promised, for he had no choice; but a daughter of whom questions must never be asked seemed to him a sorry comfort to a man's old age.

CHAPTER II

It was not till after midsummer that Olive began to realize what hung over her. The vague terrors which had pursued her all the spring had grown more definite, the shadows were blacker, the nightmares more persistent; the laughing images, at first scattered and fragmentary, now passed before her shut, half-dreaming eyes in long processions, forming, glowing, fading rhythmically, like magic-lantern pictures on a moving slide; but, so far, that was all.

The first actual waking hallucination sprang upon her unawares one hot afternoon in July. She was alone, lying on her couch at the corner of the lawn, within the shadow of the big chestnut-tree. Flickering gleams of sunshine played across her face and dress; at two paces from her a flowering lavender-bush stood in a blaze of light. For some time she lay with closed eyes, listening to the humming of bees; then, raising herself on one arm, she looked out across the garden. It was a flaming mass of colour. On the house-porch yellow and crimson roses glowed against a background of jasmine; blue larkspur, red carnations, marigolds and day-lilies flared in the sunny border; from the trellis arches over the path swung trails of purple clematis. Close

to her the clipped edge of the lawn shone, vivid green, below the gray leaves of the lavender.

Then the colours and the lights were gone. Somewhere a creature—herself, yet not all of herself—moved in a shadowy room, not round, but many-sided; and all the panels of the walls were pictures. Another self, unfriendly to the first one, looked on as at a show. It saw the first, the real self, turn towards one of the picture-walls, and find the picture gone and a black square where it had been, as though a veil had been dropped over the panel. A moment later another picture had vanished, then still another, till black squares were everywhere. At that, fear came upon the defenceless creature, and it flung itself with outstretched hands against the nearest of the black squares. But the hands passed through, touching nothing, into empty space.

Then the creature fixed its eyes upon one panel: a landscape, with grass and trees and a winding stream; and watched it with a fierce attention, trying not to see the vanishing walls, the spreading blackness all around; till at one corner of the picture there came a small black spot, then a wide rent swiftly lengthened; and, in the passing of an instant, trees and grass and water all had shrivelled up and gone, and the outer darkness looked in, as a wolf looks, with hungry eyes. Then, and only then, the wretched creature understood that all its familiar surroundings, all its joys, its loves, its gods, were but painted films, that had been stretched between it and the darkness.

Meanwhile the other self, quiescent, remained a

careless onlooker. It saw the creature standing, forlorn, upon the bit of floor that remained a vanishing island in a limitless black sea. It saw that last foothold shrivel and disappear, and the creature plunged and sinking in billows of darkness that swept over its head and drowned its desperate cries. It saw, and laughed, and would not reach a hand to help, for there was no pity in its withered heart.

Struggling, fighting, shrieking for help that never came, the creature tossed and glided, floated and sank; and the black waves tumbled around it, slipped through its fingers, pressed upon its eyes. Shapes fled past through empty space, luminous and distant, glittering and close; and the creature stretched out hands to them, imploring, clung and moaned against their feet; but none would help. Sometimes, struggling madly towards the light that shone from them, it would seize and try to hold them fast, but either they were smooth and cold, and slid away from its weak fingers, or they were merely painted films, that burst and shrivelled at its touch. So it would sink down and down, while black waves closed again above its head.

Then within its own body came a black spot, a hidden point of emptiness that grew and always grew. For this was the inner darkness; and its desire was to tear a way for itself to the outer darkness and be one with it; to destroy and annihilate utterly the creature that had believed itself alive, and that, like all things in earth or heaven, was but a painted film. . . .

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The first thing which came back was the bright green of the clipped lawn edge ; then in a moment the rainbow colours of the flowering garden were all around her, and bees were humming in the lavender. She lay still and dared not move.

Her father's pony-trap came up the drive. He leaned sideways as he passed the tree, and flung a trail of wild honeysuckle into her lap.

"A treasure for you !"

She put out a hand to take the coral-tipped trumpets that had fallen against her knee, then drew it back suddenly without touching them. If they were not real flowers . . . if they were only a painted film . . .

She pressed cold hands over her eyes to shut out the sight of the honeysuckle. How could she know it would not shrivel at her touch ?

She must have lain so for a long time ; when her mother's voice roused her the shadow of the tree had moved, and the sunlight was blazing on her bare head

"My darling, you'll get another headache lying in this hot sun. Why, you're shivering, child !"

"It's . . . cold," she answered faintly, shuddering.

"Cold, this weather ? Why, your hands are like ice and all wet ! You had better come in."

The girl obeyed in silence. She shuddered again when her mother kissed her forehead. What has a painted film to do with kissing ?

* * * * *

The fear of madness came upon her for the first time as she lay awake that night. She had fallen

asleep on lying down, and had started up screaming at the old cry : " Water ! water ! water !" This time the dream had been so vivid that when she woke the sound seemed close against her ear.

She pushed the hair back from her forehead. It was wet and matted, and her hands shook as she lifted them. One could never get used to these things, it seemed ; the moment of waking after each fresh nightmare was as fearful now as at the first.

Then she remembered the painted films. But they had come when she was awake, in full possession of her senses, in clear daylight. The cry for water was only in her sleep. If that, too, were to invade her waking mind . . .

She understood suddenly. If that happened, she would know it for a sign of coming madness.

Day after day, night after night, she waited and listened. Sometimes, as she lay awake, the throbbing of her pulses, the rise and fall of her breathing, would beat out a stealthy rhythm : " Water ! water ! water !" But as a sound she heard it only in sleep.

But the other dread was always closer upon her. By September her life had become so haunted that she dared not touch familiar things for fear of painted films. The garden was a place of horror ; its colours and its lights were all a sham. In the house the staircase terrified her ; what if it should crumble into dust when she set her foot upon it ? Worst of all were the hollow shapes called father, mother, sister, that moved and talked as if they were alive, and kissed her with lips already shrivelling away.

During the autumn she grew a little less weak and emaciated in body ; and at the beginning of winter a chance incident half roused her mind, for a moment, from its long nightmare. A child in the village died ; and the mother, formerly a servant in the Latham household, confided to Dick Grey that she had set her heart upon " her young ladies " coming to see the body.

Jenny, when he asked her to go with him to the place, consented at once, though with a little grimace. She hated corpses, and had not yet succeeded in learning to like cottagers ; but she honestly wished to afford the poor woman any comfort in her power, especially if her doing so would please Dick.

" And you ? " he asked, turning wistfully to Olive.

" If you like," she answered, without raising her head. " I don't care."

His eyes dropped. He remembered the old Olive who would have needed no asking ; the mothers who had clung to her ; the children whom she had made ready for their coffins with such strong and gentle hands.

When he and the two girls approached the bed the mother stooped down and drew the sheet back from the face. She pointed out to them tearfully the elaborate frilled nightgown ; in the midst of her grief it consoled her to feel that the dead baby had " everything of the best, like any lady's child." " We'll have to pinch for it," she said, turning to the coffin with the shiny handles and satin lining ; " but we wouldn't let her be buried in one of those cheap things, not if it was ever so."

Dick softly praised the coffin and the spotless bedclothes, and Jenny, conquering her physical repugnance, laid her mother's white chrysanthemums on the child's breast with a hurried murmur of pious commonplaces. But the bereaved woman, though she said: "Yes, Miss Jenny," and: "Thank you, sir," between her sobs, turned away from the comforters to look at Olive's haunted eyes. "Miss Olive, my dear," she said as she opened the door; "you've seen trouble too, anybody can tell that by your face; you can feel for me. Oh,"—with another burst of tears—"I never thought I should bury her!"

Olive looked up, trying, in a serious, puzzled way, to understand.

"After all," she said; "it doesn't matter very much; she's quite dead. So long as people are not buried before they die . . ."

She broke off, suddenly realizing that she was saying something monstrous and impossible, and that the woman had dropped the apron from her eyes and was staring in horrified amazement.

"Olive!" Jenny gasped when they left the house. "How can you be so heartless!"

"I can't help it if I was made that way," she answered. "There's something so grotesque about it all."

"About what?"

"I don't know; corpses, and condolences, and frilled nightgowns. People cry because someone they cared about is dead, and then you have to sympathize. And after all, what does it matter? The child is not more dead than other people. Most

of us are dead, only we take such a long time to find it out."

Jenny opened her lips to speak, but Dick, who had lingered for a moment in the cottage, came up quickly behind them and stopped her with a gesture.

"Take my arm, Olive," he said.

They had only a little way to walk; but, entering the garden drive, he felt Olive's weight heavy against him. Her face was dead-white when they reached the house.

"Olive!" Jenny cried, catching a glimpse of her sister's profile; "my dear, what is the matter?"

"Nothing." Olive had dropped Dick's arm at the foot of the stairs. Jenny ran up to her, terrified.

"But you're ill; you look awful! Mr. Grey . . ."

Olive turned slowly and faced them, clinging to the banister, in her tense attitude of a creature attacked.

"Can't you let me alone? There's nothing the matter with me; there's never anything the matter; only I'm tired. Don't you see? I'm tired."

She turned and went upstairs.

That night she paced her room and raged against gods and men. The sight of the dead child had forced on her a hateful consciousness that she herself was living and condemned to live, cursed with steel nerves that would not break for any wrenching. Yet other people managed to die easily enough, or to forget. Everything came to them easily: life and death, tears and oblivion; everything, even sleep. No doubt the childless mother was sleeping soundly now, for all her swollen eyelids. Next spring there

would be a new baby, and new clothes to make for it, with plentiful consolation of tucks and frills, and the dead child would be forgotten.

Some buried ghost of the Olive that Vladimir had known struggled up for a moment to the surface, gravely compassionate, full of swift tenderness for any living thing that grieved. Her eyes grew suddenly dim at the thought of the woman's tear-stained face.

Then the other self came back, and she threw up her head and laughed. Ah, the doleful faces of these lucky folk that mourn for their dead, their comfortable, pampered dead! They will weep, of course, bitterly for a day or two, mildly for a week; then they will go to church in new crape finery, and say their prayers, and dry their eyes, and think they know what hell is.

Oh, the horror of this double consciousness: the self that feels, the other self that looks on and laughs! . . .

She raised both hands and clasped them above her head. "I shall go mad!" she cried aloud. "Karol, I am going mad!"

Karol . . . yes, Karol was not among the smug, satisfied people that weep for their dead. But Karol, too, might be a painted film.

Her hands fell slowly. She crept back to her cold bed and lay down in the dark.

* * * * *

Before Christmas the first snow fell; and her father found her in the garden late at night, bare-footed,

walking in her sleep, with white flakes powdering her loose, uncovered hair. He tried to get her back to bed without waking her; but at his touch she flung up her hands with a horrible cry:

"Ah! ah! there's snow on me—snow!"

She began beating it off her face and neck with both hands, frantically.

"Olive!" Mrs. Latham cried, running out at the sound; and the girl fled to her and cowered, shivering, against her breast. It was the first time since her return that her mother's caresses met with any response; and now it was only for an instant. Still trembling, she drew herself away and looked at them with the hard eyes that they had learned to dread.

"It's nothing, thanks. I had a nightmare; it was the . . . snow."

* * * * *

For all the nightmares, her bodily strength was returning. By February she could take long walks without fatigue, and a restless energy began to replace the deadly lassitude of last year. Most of her time was now spent in wandering alone about the leafless woods. Idleness was so unnatural to her that the first glimmer of returning health brought with it a craving to get away out of this sleepy place, from among these leisurely folk. Yet the thought of going back to her work in London, when it crossed her mind, sickened her with horror.

She had done with nursing, she told herself day after day, tramping the wet, cold wood-paths. Her professional life had ended when she followed the blue

uniforms down the stairs. It had not been her fault, but the thing had happened ; nothing could alter that. She, a nurse, had failed to protect from actual bodily violence the patient entrusted to her care ; had failed even to die defending him. Had she suffered and outlived a sexual outrage, it would not have been more utterly the end of all things. A hundred times she went back in her memory over all the details, tormenting herself with vain speculations. Was there anything she could have done ? What would have happened if she had not submitted, if she had thrown the lighted lamp in the officer's face ? She knew that could have ended in nothing but in exposing the dying man to worse brutalities ; but would it not have been better so ? Perhaps then he might have died more quickly, might not have felt the cold so long.

As the winter passed into spring and increasing bodily strength brought with it a gradual awakening of the stunned mind, she began at last to realize how completely her life was wrecked. Nothing was left to her but a hole in a swamp and the ever-recurring dread of painted films.

Very early one April morning, after a night of horror that drove her from her haunted room to wander aimlessly about the fields, she came upon Dick Grey, whistling cheerfully in the footpath leading up from the low marsh lands. She turned back to avoid meeting him ; but he had seen her, and, quickening his pace, caught her up beside a flowering cherry-tree. Clean-limbed and wholesome in his threadbare coat, he seemed to carry about with

him an atmosphere of cold baths and open-air sports and loving interest in humankind. His boots were covered with the heavy mud of the marshes; and as he ran up to her, with bright eyes shining under his shabby hat, an empty coffee-can jingled in his hand.

"Why, Olive, it's like old times to see you about so early. Isn't it a glorious morning?"

"I suppose so," she answered, glancing round at the dewy landscape.

His face changed quickly.

"Another bad night? Oh, I'm so sorry, dear!"

The line of her mouth grew straight. She had a nervous dread of any softened mood in her friends or relatives; it always brought nearer the odious possibility of someone asking questions. She plunged hastily into small-talk.

"Have you been down in Gilford Hollow? Your boots look like it."

"Yes, getting old Susan Mead her breakfast. She's laid up with rheumatism, and no one else will do it for her, because she's supposed to be a disreputable character. The poor soul tells me every morning she 'don't believe in parsons, and don't want charity neither.' Very human, isn't it? I assured her to-day I wasn't keen on parsons myself; and as for charity, if she likes hot coffee, I like an early walk. Wasn't the sunrise a stunner this morning?"

A dim little smile flickered round Olive's mouth.

"What's the joke?" he asked at once.

"I was only wondering what the Rector would say if he heard you talk that way to Susan."

Dick burst out laughing.

"Good old Wickham! I believe he asks in his prayers every night what he's done to be afflicted with a Socialist curate. It is jolly hard luck for him, poor old buffer!"

He broke off and began kicking a tuft of grass.

"Look here, Olive: I've been wanting to talk to you for a long time, only I've just funk'd it. I . . ."

He came to another stop. Olive stood quite still, hard-eyed, with compressed lips.

"You know, I've never asked you any questions," he went on hurriedly; "after what you told me that day in the train; and, of course, I'm not going to tell you how . . . sorry I am, and all that. But it's . . . it's frightful to see anyone burnt up like this in one year. Perhaps you may say, what is it to me? . . ."

Her eyes flashed.

"Yes, I do say, what is it to you?"

"Well, it's just this to me: that I've loved you pretty faithfully for some years, and . . . not bothered you overmuch about it; and I wish to God you wouldn't shut yourself away from all the people that care for you, even if there isn't anything we can do to help you. Look here, never mind about me—I'm an ass, of course, and anyway I don't count—but it's making your father an old man before his time. . . ."

She turned her back on him without speaking, and pulled a branch of cherry-blossom down against her face. The utter desolation of her attitude kept him hesitating miserably. At last he came a step nearer.

"Olive, I've not . . . upset you, have I?"

"Oh no, I'm not upset; only there's no use in talking about these things. I know you all mean kindly, but you'd better let me alone."

She raised her head after a moment, still holding down the flowering branch.

"About father . . . I think perhaps I'd better have kept away from my people altogether—from everybody, I mean. It would have been fairer to all of you, and . . . not so hard for me."

The branch had begun to tremble under her hand.

"It was very good of father and . . . everyone, to be so patient. I . . . shall be going away soon. . . ."

Then her voice died out softly. She stood looking straight before her, with dilated eyes.

"I haven't a notion what you mean," Dick burst out. "I'm talking in the dark, of course; but I know that the best cure for a personal grief is to have something outside of it that you believe in; and I've never regretted so bitterly as now that I didn't manage to win you over to Socialism in the old days. If I hadn't been such a confounded ass then . . ."

"Socialism?" The cherry-branch sprang back. She turned and faced him, laughing, under a rain of white petals. "'Morrison's pills for universal happiness'? Which kind, for choice? The Hampstead variety, all economic statistics and afternoon tea, or the old Bermondsey sort that you were so fond of, with the beer and the banners? I think, if I were going in for anything, I'd try anarchism; the kind that flourishes in back-streets in Soho, with

dyed moustaches and sardine-tins full of picric acid. There's something satisfying about that, anyway."

He drew back slowly and stood looking at her, his tanned face grown pale.

"I beg your pardon, dear," he said at last huskily. "It was my fault for interfering with you. I won't do it again."

The girl's eyes softened.

"I'm sorry, Dick ; I don't want to be brutal to you or to anyone, if you'll only let me alone. But try to understand that you can't help me ; no one in the world can help me. I must find my own way out."

The fear came back into her face. She turned slowly away from him ; and he, watching her as she walked down the path, saw her pause beside a red-tipped daisy that looked up at her out of the wet grass with its wide, confident gaze. Cold dread fell upon him as she crushed the wee white thing deliberately under the heel of her shoe. She walked on, and he stood looking after her in dreary wonder. Was this Olive, and did she grudge joy and sunshine to all living things because Vladimir was dead ?

CHAPTER III

CLEAR May sunlight shone on the blossoming clover-field, on the hawthorn hedge beside the copse, on the white stile where the footpaths crossed. Karol, walking up from Heathbridge station, paused to look back over green slopes at the golden buttercup meadows spread below.

With the whole afternoon before him there was no need for hurry. That was fortunate, as matters stood : he would want quite steady nerves to meet Olive ; and of late, whenever the chronic strain under which he lived happened to be a little heavier than usual, he had found it no easy matter to keep them steady. Not that he had ever failed, so far ; no one else had guessed that anything was wrong with him, but he had known it himself for a long time, and now he knew what it was. Luckily these things come slowly ; he wouldn't have to go under just yet. There would be time to get a lot more work done first.

He sat down on the stile, putting up one foot on the lower rung with a curiously awkward movement, and watched the flitting waves of light and shadow on the clover. A few yellow patches of

turnip-flower, seeded from last year's crop, stood out boldly above the dusky crimson of the clover-field. On the other side of the path was young wheat, with here and there an early cornflower or poppy, and beyond that a honey-scented bean-field. Close to him, in the hedge, a family of baby sparrows twittered softly in their nest.

He pulled a notebook out of his pocket, and began to sum up his engagements for next week. He had to go into Essex to see a man on business, and another wanted him to run up to Scotland about those Polish miners that had got into a trade union dispute. They must wait a bit. Then there were some starving emigrants in Liverpool, who must be seen to at once. As for London, there were a dozen appointments in the East End, one in the lobby of the House of Commons, two in Bayswater. . . .

He unfolded a map. "East Ham. . . . No, he must come to me; I can't spare the time. Finsbury Park; where is it? Battersea. . . ."

The consulting-room where he had sat a few hours ago came back in a flash.

"You know, yourself," the grave voice had said; "there is no cure; but you may be able to put it off for a few years more if you go slowly for a bit, or take a thorough rest."

"I'm one of the organizers of an active and growing political party," he had answered. "It's not a life that gives one much chance to go slowly; and as for resting, I suppose there'll be time for that when it comes."

"Would your party rather do without you for a few months, or altogether? Come now, you're a doctor yourself; you know as well as I do what it means."

Yes, he knew. All the same, he must put a few things straight before he knocked off work. And certainly he must look after Olive.

"Have many of your folk so much grit?" the specialist had asked him as they shook hands. He had merely shrugged his shoulders for answer; what use in explaining? It was not a case of "grit," but just that death didn't happen to be the thing he minded most. For death was, after all, the worst it need come to; he himself could decide how long he cared to go on living, since the disease itself is not merciful enough to kill. At any rate, it would leave his mind quite clear, so he would be free to settle matters at his discretion. If a man has nothing worse than that to be afraid of . . . to be afraid of. . . . He dropped the map, groped after it for an instant, then let his hands fall, and sat still.

This was the enemy, the hidden fear that haunted him; this one memory that would come back and catch him by the throat. Happily it came very seldom; but then suddenly, as a beast springs and gives no warning. It was the memory of a certain night in Akatui.

And yet there was nothing to remember, nothing to be afraid of, except fear. When matters had gone really wrong, he had always been able to keep his head. Perhaps he was born insensitive, perhaps

it was because he was physically so big and strong ; at any rate, he had managed, somehow, to jog through things that had driven men as good as he to drink, or madness, or suicide. He had been quite cool those last three nights beside the dying Squirrel, his best friend out there ; black, endless nights, hideous with the gasping that he could do nothing to relieve.

Then there was the famine-strike, when the collective request of the prisoners for the dismissal of a brutal warder had been ignored, and they had forced the hands of the authorities by refusing food and drink. They had won in the end, of course ; a general slow suicide would be too ugly a scandal, and might even get into the foreign papers ; but the victory had been expensive. Yet even on the last day, when more than half of the strikers were light-headed with the pain of thirst, he had kept perfectly steady. And he had been among those who had not succumbed in the middle of hell let loose, when epilepsy struck the place like a tornado, and one man after another fell shrieking to the floor. It was the same when the youngest of their number, in a moment of despair, had hidden and drunk the vitriol used in the work. The boy (he was only twenty-three, and everyone called him " The Boy ") had lingered for thirty hours, conscious to the last, and died in Karol's arms.

All these things he had faced, and conquered, and put behind him with a resolute will, and there was not a horror among them all that he could not forget or dared not remember. But that one night was different.

As for the particular thing that had happened, it was so slight, so unimportant a trifle that he had even forgotten it ; merely some chance addition to the thousand petty miseries that made up the sum of life. And he had realized in one instant that this was the limit, that he could bear nothing more, that at the next strain his reason would go. That night he had sat on the edge of his sleeping-bench and fought for breath ; not for courage, or resignation, or any of the high philosophy that helps men through dark places ; just simply for breath. And even now, after so many years, the red-hot memory would come back like this.

He might be a fool, once in a way, but at least he was never a fool for many minutes on end. He pulled himself together presently, with set teeth.

The thing was absurd, of course. If he had not gone mad then he was unlikely to lose himself now ; and as for anything that remains in one's own hands, that can be put straight at will with a dose of morphia, anybody can face that, with a little practice.

He got off the stile, picked up his map and put it away ; then, leaning his arms along the rail, looked down again at the golden meadows. A girl in a blue dress was walking through the buttercups. As she came nearer the rolling swell of the land hid her for a moment, then her figure appeared again, outlined, as the path turned, against red clover or green wheat. Her face was hidden, partly by an armful of buttercups, and partly by the

brim of her shady hat. He drew back from the stile to let her pass, and stood looking at her with a stifling contraction of the heart. Was it a custom of English girls to walk with that untrammelled step, and carry their heads that way?

She shifted the buttercups to the other arm, and he saw her face. The next instant she had recognised him, and stopped short, a statue in the path. The buttercups slid from her hands, one by one, and fell at her feet.

Karol stooped down and picked them all up, very carefully, before he spoke. It took him rather a long time, but she remained quite motionless.

"I couldn't manage to come before," he said, gathering up the last stalks. "I've had so many things to do, somehow."

"Yes?" she murmured, with a troubled look. "I haven't been doing anything; there isn't anything to do."

They crossed the stile and walked down the wood-path.

"Look," she said, pausing with her feet in the long grass; "those are speedwells."

She stooped to gather a few sprays, and blew the tiny flowers off their stems, laughing.

"See, they are all gone. Everything goes."

"Not quite everything."

She looked at him with narrowed eyes.

"You were always accurate. Did you come by the midday train? You must be thirsty; come in and have some tea."

He followed her into the garden. She walked

with her head erect, feeling, with dull resentment, like an insect under a microscope.

"Father," she said, as Mr. Latham stepped out from under the great wistaria to meet them; "this is Dr. Slavinski, whom I met in Russia. He is staying at Heathbridge for the week-end."

The covert antagonism showed for one instant in her father's face; then he shook hands graciously, but Karol had seen and understood.

"He's got a grudge against people she met in Russia," he thought, turning to bow to Jenny, who came up with her straw hat swinging from her arm. "And so has the pretty sister. They'd turn me out of the house if they dared."

It was, indeed, only by some exercise of self-control that Olive's relatives behaved with ordinary courtesy to her guest. All three of them were profoundly convinced that this hairy and tow-coloured stranger had the key to the locked door at which they had been knocking in vain for fifteen months; and all three, in their varying degrees, suspected him of using remorselessly the power over her which he apparently possessed. She, for her part, held him at arm's length, keeping, the whole afternoon, as near as possible to her mother and sister, in evident fear of being left an instant alone with him. Twice during tea Mr. Latham's hands clenched themselves under the table at the sight of her scared eyes. As for the mother, she could hardly even conceal her dread and dislike of the intruder; and Jenny sat opposite to him like an angry spaniel, ready to fly at his throat if he should

harm her sister, and looking prettier than ever in her rage.

Karol, according to his wont, saw everything and held his tongue. When he left the house, parrying Mrs. Latham's cold invitation to stay and dine, with a plea of business letters to write, he already knew that Olive had suffered a dangerous nervous breakdown, that she had kept her people ignorant of what had caused it, and that they, in their grief and bewilderment, suspected him of every indefinite abomination that chanced to cross their minds.

"Father," Jenny burst out when her sister went up to bed; "Olive's afraid of that man!"

"What makes you think so?" Mr. Latham asked her drily, with his face turned away.

"I don't think it, I know it. When my crewel-silks dropped I rested my hand on her knee while I stooped for them, and she was shaking from head to foot."

"There, there! light your candle, my dear; your imagination runs away with you."

When she shut the door behind her, the husband and wife turned with a common impulse and looked at each other.

"Alfred, what is it? What can she have to do with him?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly; "but I mean to know before he goes back to London. I haven't dared to ask her anything, but if she's being threatened or terrified . . ."

Mrs. Latham clasped her hands.

"Alfred, you don't think . . ."

She hesitated, with wide, frightened eyes.

"You remember . . . when the telegraph boy waked her . . . You don't think she's got mixed up with . . . Nihilists or horrible people of that sort?"

"I don't know what to think. The man may be a blackmailer or anything. But it's no use jumping to conclusions; it may be just that seeing him reminds her of some shock. Still, I too had the impression that she was afraid of him."

When Olive came downstairs next morning, very pale and heavy-eyed, her parents had finished breakfast, and were standing by the window talking earnestly together. They left off as she entered.

"I'm sorry, mother," she said; "I'm late again."

"You look as if you'd had another bad night; not a headache, I hope?"

"A little headache, nothing to matter."

Her mother stood looking at her for a moment, mournfully perplexed; then sighed and went out of the room, while Mr. Latham drummed with his fingers on the window-pane. Presently he turned round.

"Olive, I promised you a year ago not to ask you questions. There is one question that I must ask you now. Is that man who came here yesterday a friend of yours?"

Her cup rattled against the saucer as she put it down.

"What do you mean, father?"

"Nothing beyond just what I say, my child. Your secrets, since you must have secrets, are quite

safe from me. I only want to know : is that man a friend or an enemy ?”

She turned sideways, leaning on the arm of her chair, and covered her face. He bent down over her.

“Olive, do you want help ? Don’t tell me anything else ; only tell me that. Are you afraid of this man ?”

She sprang up, releasing her hand.

“No, no ; he’s my best friend. Oh, you don’t understand ; you don’t understand !”

“Have you given me much chance to understand, my dear ?”

There was no reproach in his voice, but the girl dropped her eyes. A vague sense that she had been cruel to her people began, for the first time, to struggle upwards in her mind.

Her father was drumming on the window-glass again, telling himself despondently that he had only made things worse by speaking, when he felt her arms slip round his neck. He held his breath ; it was the first caress since she had come home.

“Father . . .”

Her hands trembled on his shoulder.

“Father, I’ve been nothing but a disappointment to you . . . and mother. . . . I can’t help it ; I can’t talk about things. Karol . . . Dr. Slavinski . . . is the only person that knows all about me. Perhaps he can help me ; no one else can. I . . . I am sorry, father ; but I wish you wouldn’t worry about me. I am not the sort of daughter you ought to have had. And . . . you have Jenny . . .”

He caught her to him and kissed her, with a lump in his throat. It was on his tongue to cry out to her that she was more to him than a thousand Jennies; but though she tried to return the kiss he felt her shudder with uncontrollable physical repugnance, and drew back from her as if he had been stung.

"Yes," he said, as he turned away; "it is fortunate that we have Jenny."

When he looked up she had left the room.

Jenny and her mother came back from church to the Sunday mid-day dinner in some fear lest they might find the house invaded by the objectionable visitor. But he had not come, Mr. Latham told them; and Olive had spent the morning alone in her room. She came down to dinner, still very white, but with a set look in her face that was new to them.

"How long is your friend staying in Heathbridge?" the mother asked, as they rose from the table.

"He goes back to London to-morrow."

"Is he living there?"

"I don't know where he is going to live; he has only just come to England."

Mrs. Latham folded up her napkin with elaborate care, trying to speak lightly.

"Is he likely to call again, do you think, before he goes back?"

"I sent Jimmy Bates down this morning to ask him to come and spend the afternoon with me."

Everyone seemed startled and uncomfortable.

Jenny, glancing out of the window, broke the awkward pause by saying viciously :

"And there he is, coming up the road. Do all Russians walk as clumsily as that, and kick up the dust with their toes?"

"Jenny, Jenny!" Mrs. Latham expostulated, with an anxious look at Olive, who only remarked :

"He is not a Russian."

"Well, whatever he is, I never saw a man walk so badly. There, I knew he'd blunder over the mat! And I don't believe he's brushed his hair since . . ."

"That will do, Jenny," her father interrupted in a tone she seldom heard, and turned to Olive.

"I dare say you would like to have a talk alone with your friend part of the time. After tea, when your mother goes to lie down, Jenny and I will leave you to yourselves."

"Thank you," she answered, while Jenny and the mother stared amazed.

Deadly small-talk followed, in an atmosphere charged with storm. Jenny showed the visitor round the garden, watching him suspiciously with bright eyes, and holding her muslin skirts out of the dust he raised. The hostess, nervous and perplexed, contributed occasional polite remarks, and her husband smoked and held his tongue. Who or what the big, quiet man might be he dared not think; probably a Socialist, or something equally objectionable. Mr. Latham had no love for extreme opinions, especially when held by hairy foreigners; and was half ready to suspect that it

was "some random stuff of that sort" which had stolen away his daughter and given him instead this joyless changeling. But for fifteen months he had tried, and failed, to help her; it was not for him to make difficulties if anyone else, Socialist or no, could succeed. He was ready to welcome Anarchism itself, if it would drive the dreadful lassitude out of her eyes.

Some of Jenny's friends dropped in casually to tea on the lawn. Though a little astonished, for the first moment, at Karol's size and uncouth appearance, they were soon reassured by his amiably negative manners, and succeeded far better than the family in keeping up such dribble of platitudes as appeared suited to the slow intelligence of this good-natured giant. Olive was unusually gay and talkative; and her father, glancing at Karol from time to time, saw that he had noticed this, as he noticed everything.

"The man's got eyes in the back of his head," he thought. "He sees those people are fools enough to take him for a fool; and he sees she doesn't want them undeceived. And, yes, he sees I know it."

After tea the mother went to her room. Jenny, at a sign from her father, took her friends to call on a neighbour, and he carried his book into the house.

Karol held the gate open while the ladies passed out, chattering like a flock of starlings; then closed it deliberately and turned to look at Olive. She was sitting on the bench under the blossoming chestnut-tree, dangling a cluster of early cherries

by their stalks. He had never seen her look so young, so English, so like Jenny. Her face, her attitude, her cool and dainty summer dress, her burnished coils of thick brown hair, were all in harmony with the ordered ease of the smooth lawn, with the placid stateliness of the chestnut-tree. As he watched her, the troubled shadows deepened in Karol's eyes.

"Well, my girl," he said; "and how long is this sort of thing going to last?"

The hand that dangled the cherries paused for an instant in the air, then fell at her side, the fingers tightening over the stalks.

Soon she looked round and tossed the cherries on the grass. A bright-eyed robin flew down from the syringa-bush and pecked at them, glancing up at her. He was fed with crumbs every morning, and was tame.

"Don't you think that a wise bird?" she said. "So long as there are people who throw cherries . . ."

She rose and set her back against the tree-trunk. But for a little quivering of the nostrils, her face was unchanged. When Karol spoke again his voice was deep and hoarse.

"I'm a bit short of time, you see. I came down here to know if I could be of any use to you."

"Did you, Karol? I've come a longer way; and I've come in the dark. I don't see what use you can be to me, unless . . ."

There her voice died out. He came closer.

"Unless . . .?"

"Unless you will help me get . . . a passport. . . ."

"Ah!" was all Karol said; but she looked up at him quickly, and saw that he had guessed her meaning.

She caught her throat with both hands.

"Oh, I am haunted by the furies! Karol, it will end that way. I shut it out and beat it off, and it comes back, and back. . . . I shall give in at last, and do it; I can't hold out for ever. . . ."

She cowered down on the bench, hiding her face.

Karol stood still and looked at the bird pecking the cherries. If he had understood less clearly he might have found some comfort to offer; as it was, the very childishness of the thing tied his tongue. That she should have fought so long, so desperately, with a pitiful bogey like this!

"Let us come to details," he said at last. "You want to get into Russia under a false name; on your people's account, of course?"

A shudder ran through the crouching figure.

"How could I ever let them find out it was I? Just think what it would mean to them! I must disappear. . . ."

"Well, that's easy enough to manage, if necessary. But if I'm to help you, I must know what I'm helping you with. You can't tell me? Am I to guess? I suppose you want to kill someone. Who is it?"

She looked up at him like a child, wide-eyed and innocent.

"I don't know; I never thought about it."

He put a hand on her shoulder.

"Think then; and think well. You can't afford

to make a mistake in this, because you'll be dead before you can put it right."

Her head drooped slowly. Once she caught her breath in a quick, furtive way, and the hand pressed more heavily on her shoulder. Presently she looked up again.

"I can't think ; my head gets all muddled. And what does it matter who it is ? Madeyski—anybody ; it's a way out."

"We will discuss that later," he said. "Just give your mind to one question now : will any weapon do, or must it be a knife ?"

She repeated the word, shuddering.

"A knife. . . ."

"Something that you can feel pass through a solid substance, and be sure it's not a shadow. . . ."

"Karol, Karol ! Then you know . . ."

She had sprung up with a frenzied outcry. Karol pushed her gently back on to the bench.

"Why, you poor child ! And did you think you were the only one ?"

At that she broke into wild sobbing, and clung to him like a drowning creature. As for him, he drew her close to him and stroked her hair, as one caresses a scared baby ; and smiled to think what a fuss theologians make over their twopenny hells in a world where a man may have to bear things of this sort and to hold his tongue.

When she had worn herself out with sobbing, and leaned back against the tree-trunk with a hand over her eyes, his skilful interrogation drew from her, bit by bit, the details of the fear that

haunted her, the nightmares and hallucinations, the vanishing pictures, the shrivelling films.

"This is the horrible thing," she told him : "while Volodya lived, I made him more unhappy than he need have been by worrying him with scruples of conscience about his political work. I didn't know of anything definite to object to ; but I'd got a sort of general notion that he believed in answering violence with violence ; and that seemed to me so wrong that nothing could ever make it right. I haven't altered one bit ; I think violence is always wrong and always stupid ; I don't believe it can ever help anybody. I tell myself that every day, all day long ; and then I go to bed and lie half the night thinking out plans to kill somebody . . . to kill somebody. . . ."

Her hands began to wander up and down the skirt of her dress. Karol leaned across and touched them, and they grew still at once.

"I want to get clear about one thing," he said. "You are quite sure it's not any motive of personal revenge that is prompting you ?"

"Revenge ? What's the use of that ? All the revenge in the world won't bring Volodya back."

"It's merely to escape from the films, isn't it ? You want to destroy something that has a tangible bodily presence, and satisfy yourself that it is solid ? Then why must it be just a Russian official ? Try to give me a logical reason for that."

She shook her head and answered again :

"I don't know."

"One more point, and I have done. You told

me you had been to a doctor in London. Does he know about the films?"

"No, no; how could you think I should tell him? Karol—oh, you don't think . . . You don't think I'm going mad . . ."

Her eyes dilated fearfully.

"No, I think you have been ill, and are getting better. As for this scheme of yours, we can't begin to discuss it till you are quite well. If in six months' time you tell me you are still of the same mind, I will see what I can do. Meanwhile, I want your help in a practical matter at once. I have an obstetric case in London that needs first-class nursing; there are dangerous complications. Will you undertake it for me?"

She recoiled.

"Anything but that! I can never do nursing again."

"It's for you to decide, of course; but I have been rather counting on you. It's connected with some work that Volodya cared enough about to risk his safety for it, and I felt sure you wouldn't refuse."

"What work?"

"Looking after our peasants that have escaped from religious persecution. A lot of pious, old-fashioned country folk in Poland and Lithuania belong to a special body, the Uniats. The Russians are trying to force the orthodox Church on them, and the ones that are left alive, and have not been . . . converted, have made a wild rush for America. Many of the sick and feeble are stranded half-way

and starving in London ; and one of the last things Volodya did was to get up a subscription for them secretly among St. Petersburg students and working men."

" And the obstetric case ?"

" It's a peasant woman whose husband has been sent to Siberia for refusing to take the Sacrament in a Russian church. There will be two children left unprovided for if she dies, so I want to find a nurse that I can trust to save her, if possible. They're not easy folk to deal with ; they speak nothing but the old Lithuanian language, which nobody understands ; and they're dirty, and ignorant, and half crazed with fear. They're so used to ill-treatment that if one shows them kindness they suspect a trap. . . ."

" How soon do you want me ?"

" Next week."

" Very well ; I'll come."

" I'll run in and arrange details with you tomorrow. I must go and write letters now. Good-bye."

He shook hands and went away as if they had been talking of everyday trifles. She looked round her slowly. The sunset was fading. She stood alone in the gathering dusk, and yet was not afraid ; for the painted films had gone.

CHAPTER IV

MR. LATHAM, coming home from business the next afternoon, found his wife in the drawing-room with Dick and Jenny, arranging a school-treat.

"Father," Jenny began at once; "he has been here again."

"Olive's friend?"

"Yes, she has gone out with him."

"I can't understand why you dislike him so," Dick said. "I found him walking up from Heath-bridge this afternoon, and we got into conversation. He's the first person who has succeeded in making bimetallism clear to me."

"Is that what you talked about?"

"That, and trades unions, and the housing problem, and protozoa, and the income tax, and village football clubs. He's got a head on his shoulders, anyway."

Jenny opened her eyes wide; that anyone could find Karol interesting to talk with had not occurred to her. Mrs. Latham said nothing; but at the first opportunity spoke to her husband alone.

"Alfred, I am convinced that man knows what it is that has changed Olive so."

"It's possible."

"He seems respectable, after all. He may be able to tell you. . . ."

"I don't think he is likely to tell me anything without her leave, and I certainly should not wish it."

"Alfred, I'm not asking you to do anything dishonourable, but it's only right this mystery should be cleared up. It's unnatural for a girl's own people to be kept in the dark like this. He is going back to London to-night. I hoped, perhaps, you would find out something while he is here."

He went to his study with the old hopeless sense of estrangement, of faint, tolerant, pitying disgust. Poor soul, how patient and unselfish she was, how ridden by an overgrown conscience; and could suggest to him, in all innocence, that he should try to worm his daughter's secrets from a guest in his own house. It was useless to explain to her that the very thought made him sick; she would never even understand why. As for Jenny, good girl as she was, a sense of honour in trifles was no more born in her than in her mother. Had he not once, when she was a child, caught her cheating at croquet? It had never happened again, but the ghost of it rose up afresh before him now. Of his dear womenfolk, Olive alone was untainted by these little, insignificant, terrible things; and Olive might have been a thousand miles away for all the chance he had of ever breaking down the walls of silence that surrounded her.

He leaned his arms on the table and buried his

face in them; then straightened himself up impatiently, hearing a knock at the door.

"Come in."

It was Karol.

"Can you spare a little time? I want to speak to you before I go back to London."

"Certainly," said Mr. Latham, frigidly polite. "What is it?"

Karol drew up a chair in his deliberate way.

"I have had a talk with Miss Latham about her affairs, and she wishes me to explain matters to you. I had better tell you first what it was that happened to her . . ."

Her father raised a hand.

"A moment! Am I to understand that you come to me at my daughter's expressed wish? I have no curiosity about any secrets of hers, unless she really desires I should know them, and in that case I should have thought she would prefer to tell me herself."

"She has no secrets, but her nerves have been injured by a shock, and she is still quite unfit to bear any mention of the subject. As I was with her at the time, she has asked me to tell you the facts, and beg you never to refer to them again."

Mr. Latham listened with a hand over his face while the bare outlines of his daughter's story were put before him in the fewest possible words.

"Now," Karol went on, "comes the question of her future. As you see, her bodily health is nearly restored, and her mind seems to be recovering too, though more slowly. I have had some experience

of these cases, and I feel sure that the sooner she gets away from home and back to work the better. She has undertaken to nurse a patient of mine in London, and I will find her more work when that is done. I think, if you will trust her to me for a few months, I can cure her. But I must ask you to leave her entirely alone for some time."

"Do you mean that we should not see her at all?"

"Neither see her nor write to her. If you don't trust my judgment, tell your family doctor what I have told you; he will say that the moral atmosphere of anxious relatives is the worst possible thing for her just now."

It was a long time before Mr. Latham spoke.

"It's not an easy thing you ask of me," he said; "but I have no right to refuse it. I suppose we owe the girl's reason to you, if not her life."

"I am not quite sure about that," Karol answered. "She might have found her way home alone, but it's scarcely likely. St. Petersburg is not a good place to lose one's balance in, especially for a woman at night."

In the evening Mr. Latham went up to Olive's room.

"My dear," he said; "I understand you want to go to London next week. I have promised your friend that none of us will come near you for three months, unless you send for us. Remember that we are always here if you do want us, and . . . come back to us as soon as you can."

She spoke in a hurried, broken whisper, locking and unlocking her fingers.

"Father . . . you have been : : . I know you have been very patient. . . . I can't talk about things. . . . I can't . . . Please don't tell mother anything. She would only cry, and . . ."

"Don't be afraid, my dear ; I never tell things to your mother."

She remembered afterwards, with undying gratitude, how he left her to herself without the dreaded comments and caresses, without one unnecessary word. The real and close friendship between them was born, perhaps, at that moment.

From cross-questioning and tearful exclamations on Mrs. Latham's part and Jenny's, he was, of course, unable to protect her, and their evidently harmful effect upon her reconciled him, more or less, to her going away. Karol, when he met her at Victoria Station, saw at a glance that she had slipped back during the week. Her hands were more unsteady, and there was a scared look in her eyes.

"You had better tell me the truth," she said next day. "I suppose I am . . . not quite in my right mind ; is that so ? I ought to know, you see, before I undertake sick-nursing again. And you needn't mind telling me ; I shan't make a fuss, whatever it is."

Karol's eyes softened.

"You belong to the class of patient to whom one does tell the truth, my dear. I think you have been very near the border, and would perhaps have gone over altogether if you had not been rather saner than most people to start with ; but I am quite

sure that whatever danger there has been is past. You will never see the films again ; no one does that has once been able to speak of them. And now I want you to fix your mind on your work, and think of nothing else. We have got to pull this woman through, and it won't be easy."

Of the homicidal impulse he said nothing ; he knew that in a few months she would forget it had ever tormented her, or would remember it only as one cured of a fever remembers afterwards the fantastic images of his delirium.

When the woman was out of danger, he wanted a child nursed through measles. Another with hip-disease followed, then an accident at a Silvertown sugar refinery. His patients were all destitute aliens in the very poor foreign quarter : Ghetto Jews, slaving in the sweating-den of some slop tailor, or Polish and Lithuanian peasants driven from their homes by economic pressure or religious persecution.

"But how do you come to be practising in London ?" she asked him one day. "I thought you had come over only for a few weeks."

"I'm not practising ; I'm in London on account of other work ; and as these people know I have been a doctor, they come to me just in a casual way when they want help."

"What other work ?"

"I have undertaken the editorship of a Polish periodical that comes out here and is smuggled across. It can't be printed in the country, you see, because of the Russian censorship."

"Then you are settled here, and not going back for some time?"

"I can't go back."

Something in the tone of his voice made her turn quickly.

"Do you mean . . . you can never go back? Are you a refugee now?"

He looked away, with a set face.

"It had to come sooner or later. I was lucky to be able to hold out so long."

"Karol," she said at last; "I wish you would tell me a little more. You see, I have nothing left in the world that is real to me, except any . . . work or friends that Volodya cared about, and I seem to live alone in the dark, always alone in the dark. I think, perhaps, I shouldn't be so frightened if you didn't shut me out quite so much from all your work. I don't want to know any secrets, but I wish I understood better what it is you are trying to do."

He was still looking out of the window. Presently he turned round.

"I wonder if you'd care to help me a bit? I have more work than I can get through, and someone that would lend a hand with proofs and look up things in the British Museum reading-room would be an enormous help. I have . . ."

He came to a stop, and looked out of the window again.

"I have some difficulty in getting about—walking and so on."

She was puzzled; Karol had always seemed to her one of the most active men she knew.

"I will do anything I can," she said doubtfully ;
"but how did you . . ."

"Get into trouble ? It's this way. Ever since I was amnestied I have been one of the organizers of the Polish industrial movement. The only way to do work of that sort without getting arrested is to make the Russians believe one has given up all interest in public matters ; then they leave off watching, and one can do anything. That's how I came to be allowed to live in Polish towns, and even come to St. Petersburg once in a way. Of course I never frequented any suspected persons there, except Volodya. The police were quite convinced I'd had enough of it, and settled down into a harmless provincial with a few mild scientific hobbies. The governor of Wilno told me one day he had felt sure Akatui would cure me."

"And now they have found out ?"

"Yes, I had to bolt this spring ; the game was up. So now I have undertaken to represent the party here ; edit the paper, and be responsible for any of our folk that come over, and so on. We have a working-men's club, and a school and free library. There's a little colony of educated young men working with me : students from Polish universities mostly ; and there are two or three professional men settled in London who give what help they can : a retired barrister from Warsaw, and others. I'll introduce them to you, and you will get an idea of the nature of the work, and see whether you care to help. If so, you'll have to learn the language."

"What did you mean about a difficulty in walking?"

"Oh, just a little stiffness. It's inconvenient when one has so much to do. Is it to-morrow your father is coming to town?"

The stipulated three months were over, and Mr. Latham had written a few lines to say that he was coming to London alone. He had found it a hard matter to be patient under the suspense of these thirteen weeks, but the change they had wrought in Olive's face convinced him, when he saw her, that the right course had been taken. Yet she wore now, perhaps, a more tragic expression than in the worst days last year. There were lines grievous to see in a face so young, but the hunted look was gone.

"Be patient a little longer," Karol said. "She is getting well faster than I had hoped, but it will take some months yet to restore her balance."

Mr. Latham sighed.

"God knows I'm not impatient. It's plain enough that you can help and I can't; the least I can do is to trust you. If only she were a little less unhappy . . . but she looks more utterly wretched now than even last year."

"That can't be helped. Coming back to life after a frostbite is not a pleasant process. But she's sticking to her work, and some day she'll begin to find an interest in it."

He said nothing of how far off that day seemed to him. It was evident that the girl herself was trying bravely to keep her thoughts fixed on her

work. What she had undertaken to do she did as a faithful drudge, with stubborn perseverance, with the exercise of all her strength, but with no hope in doing it, no joy in it when it was done. She worked as a cab-horse works, looking only at the strip of road before her, grateful for a wise hand on the rein and for the merciful blinkers that shut out the ghost of fear lurking by the wayside in the dark.

For anything beyond each day's burdens, its duties, its weariness, its crushing weight of misery, she had no strength, no nerves to spare. So, month after month, she lived, as a blind creature, in daily contact with Karol; worked with him, read with him, nursed his patients, corrected his proofs; and never saw the shadow of death upon him.

"When the paper is enlarged next year," she asked him one day; "shall you go on being editor?"

"If I am still here."

"But I thought you were going to live here permanently."

"My plans are never settled long beforehand."

* * * * *

Mr. Latham now came up every month to see her, and at New Year she went home for a holiday. She was quite well now, Karol said, and to see her friends could no longer do her any harm. Whether her visit would be much joy to them was another matter.

The mother's feeling was certainly one of relief. The unfriendly changeling whose very aspect had terrified her was gone, and the real Olive had taken her place; too old for her years, and perhaps not

looking altogether happy, but still the real, gentle, capable, unselfish Olive. When she told her husband this he buried himself in his book without answering. Jenny puckered her pretty forehead thoughtfully.

"I'm not so sure, mother ; there's no spring left in her. I suppose it's possible for people to be unselfish because there's nothing in the world they care about enough to make a fuss over it."

Mr. Latham raised his eyebrows behind his book. Certainly Jenny was growing up.

"No doubt," he said afterwards to Dick ; "we ought to feel thankful. The girl is sound again in body and mind, doing good work and filling a useful place in the world. But this thing has killed her youth in her. She's a middle-aged woman, and she's not twenty-nine."

Dick was the only person, except Karol, to whom he ever talked of Olive. Since he had known of the curate's love for her it seemed to him that he had a son. Of late he had seen quite plainly that this love was slowly passing into a tender and sorrowful memory of what she had once been, but that he regarded as a natural and inevitable process which could make no difference in his paternal feeling towards Dick. Olive, he thought, would belong for the rest of her life to a world of which Dick could know nothing beyond the mark that it had set on her as on Karol. Even her father must seem to her a gray-haired child.

After a short holiday she went back to her work in London. When her father, driving her to the

station, asked how soon he might expect her home again for a week-end, she hesitated, with downcast eyes.

"It seems ungrateful when everyone has been so kind to me ; but I think I had better not come home often."

"My darling, if it hurts you . . ."

"No, not that ; it was of mother I was thinking. She will be happier for seeing little of me."

"I am sure your visit has been an unmixed delight to her."

"Oh yes ; but if she were to see me often she would be disappointed."

"You think she would see the real you, and find how little it belongs to her ? There is no fear of that, my dear ; the real you is not so easy to get at."

"She wouldn't see me, but she would see something she couldn't understand, and it would worry her. She and Jenny are so happy together ; I should only spoil it if I came in. To have lived through some things is like having a taint of black blood ; it cuts you off from other people."

"From all other people ?"

"Not from you, daddy."

"That is well for me. I, you see, belong in neither world."

"Daddy . . ." She slipped her fingers into his. The corners of his mouth twitched as he looked down at the hand ; he was thinking how far she had travelled since the day when she put the pepsine tablets by his plate.

"Have you never realized, my child, that you are the daughter of a man who is a failure, and who has brains enough to know it? It is not having lived through things that cuts people off from their kind; it's having failed to live through them. Even I once meant to use my life, not waste it."

"And then . . . ?"

"Then I married your mother."

After a moment he went on :

"So, you see, you and your friends who are doing the world's real work stand to me not only for all I love best, but also for what I might have been. There's not much to show for it, nowadays; but I too was born in Arcady."

He stopped, seeing tears in her eyes. She brushed them away quickly.

"You needn't envy us, dear daddy; Arcady, in these latter times, is not the cheerfulest dwelling-place. It's all workshops and graveyards now, and the rain it raineth every day."

CHAPTER V

OLIVE and her father had enough in common for each to feel sure that the other would never refer to their talk on the road to Heathbridge Station. The fact of its having been, and still more the certainty that it would not be repeated, made them even closer friends than before.

He now came up to London as often as possible ; and whenever she could spare the time they would go for long walks together, or wander about museums and picture-galleries, talking either not at all or of everything but of what was real to them. He knew, without any telling, that these afternoons with him were the only gleams of sunshine in her life.

Karol had not even such communion with his kind. He had shut himself up in iron silence, and waited alone for the stealthy coming of doom. Sometimes, when he failed to notice that Olive was looking at him, the compressed lines about his mouth would make her sick with pity.

"I never knew before what exile means," she said once to Mr. Latham. "The country has been father and mother and wife and child to him ; and he can never go back."

That any other grief weighed upon him she had not guessed ; and of this one she dared not speak to him.

The spring came, late and cold in the gray streets ; then a wet, bleak, cheerless summer. A year had now passed since she began working with him ; a sample, she thought, of many years to come. They would go on this way, no doubt, side by side to their lives' ends, fellow-drudges in a world where no sun shines, where no birds ever sing.

One rainy day in autumn he walked with her from the British Museum to her lodgings. They had spent the afternoon in the reading-room, collecting data for an article which he was writing, on the hygienic statistics of Polish factory towns. Crossing Oxford Street he stumbled, lurched forwards in a helpless way, and fell heavily to the ground. Cabmen looked down from their boxes, grinning ; scornful comments passed between two bedraggled flower-girls.

"Are you hurt ?" Olive asked as he slowly and clumsily picked himself up.

He stooped, with his face away from her, and wiped the mud from his clothes.

"Not at all, thanks ; I trod on something slippery."

She glanced round ; there was nothing on the pavement.

"It must have been a nail in your shoe," she began ; and broke off, looking at him.

"Karol, you have hurt yourself ; I'm sure of it."

"Well, just a little ; it will pass off in a minute."

He remained very pale for some time, but was quite self-possessed, and on arriving at her lodgings began at once to arrange in chronological order the data which they had collected. Olive lighted the fire, as the evening was chilly, then settled to her proof-reading; and till supper was brought in neither moved. When she looked round to call him to the table, she noticed with surprise that he was not working. The expression of his face arrested her attention; she stood watching him for some time. Then she gathered up her courage and spoke.

"Karol, mayn't I know what the trouble is?"

He raised his head quickly.

"Oh, there's no trouble; I was just thinking out some business arrangements. By the way, if Marcinkiewicz should take over the editorship of the paper, would you go on working with him?"

"You are giving it up?"

"Very soon, I think. Marcinkiewicz has had some training; he will be able to manage quite well. The fact is, I have to go away as soon as the party can send over a man to take my place."

"To go away for a short time, do you mean, or altogether?"

"Altogether. Of course, my taking on the work here in London was only a temporary thing from the beginning."

Her own voice sounded to her as if it came from very far away.

"Do you know how soon you will go?"

"I have not decided yet; in a month or two, perhaps."

He rose, with a lazy movement of the shoulders. Olive stood still, her breath coming fast, the sound of her pulses beating in her ears. That he should tell her such news so lightly seemed to her like a blow across the cheek.

"I didn't really expect to be here so long," he went on. "I think the work is licked a bit into shape now. What I'm particularly glad of is that you have got so thoroughly into the way of it before I go; you'll be able to hold your own. It's only the beginning that's so difficult."

"And the . . . getting accustomed to things? Yes, you told me that in St. Petersburg. Do you remember? You gave me two or three years. Well, I've had two and a half. If you're going away . . . altogether, I should like to tell you before you go that getting accustomed hasn't helped me much."

She began putting the tea into the pot. Karol waited till she should speak again; he was never in a hurry for explanations.

"I am exacting, perhaps," she went on, laying down the spoon. "But, after all, this is the only life we can be certain of having, and I resent its being taken away without fair value given in exchange. Mind, I'm quite content to have anything sacrificed if the thing gained is worth it, but I want to see the use of it all; I want to see: What profit is there in my blood?"

Her hand began to shake a little on the edge of the tray.

"If I could be certain that Volodya himself

believed the thing he died for would succeed in the end . . . No, I don't want to talk about that. Let us keep to ourselves and our work ; that's a practical matter. Here are we, after having come through a few things which we agree to regard as . . . training, getting out a little rag of a labour paper. Oh, I know it's an excellent little paper ; there's good work put into it, and its influence is most admirable, what there is of it. But is it worth the cost ?”

“ Look here,” Karol said, sitting down astride of a chair with his arms along the back of it. “ You know what Epictetus says about lettuces : they're to be bought for a penny ; and if you want your lettuce you have to pay your penny. What people never seem to understand is that in a bad season lettuces may go up to three-halfpence, and be small at that. It's some ethical maggot about abstract justice that is worrying your head ; you want the world to get its salvation at a fair price. It can't ; it must pay the market rate of the particular place and time. I have not . . .”

He broke off ; and finished the sentence, after a moment, in a deeper voice :

“ I have not denied that prices run a bit high.”

She dropped her hands with a gesture of hopeless discouragement.

“ Oh, what does that matter ? Do you think I grumble at the price ? All you are telling me is that we have to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. I make no fuss about the penny, or the three-halfpence, or the particular image stamped

on the coin. But oh, there are such a lot of little Cæsars, and you have to coin your heart into such a lot of little pennies!"

"Yes?" he said, rising and resting one arm on the mantelpiece. "Go on. Is there much more to come?"

"That is the point I am debating. Is there anything more to come?"

He was silent.

"Take an instance," she began again, after a long pause. "Well, yourself: You remember Akatui. . . ."

The hard lines deepened round his mouth.

"No," he said. "I never remember things of that sort, except sometimes by accident."

"All the same, sometimes by accident you do remember. Akatui, I take it, is your penny."

He answered with a slow drawing-in of his breath:

"A little bit of it."

"And where is your lettuce?"

He put up a hand to screen his eyes from the fire.

"You see," Olive went on in her meditative, implacable voice; "if one is going to die, or . . . anything equivalent, one wants to know: what for? It's a question of the relative values of things. What constitutes an adequate exchange for all the life and happiness of any man or woman? Take the case of those peasants in Moscow that were crushed to death the other day scrambling for coronation gifts. They died for a tainted sausage

and a tin mug with the Emperor's head on it ; then there was a Court ball, and he and his wife danced. Well, good luck to their dancing ! Perhaps that's the rate at which Russian peasants value their lives. Are you prepared to say that the generations to come will think we valued ours much higher ?"

Karol began to pace the room with his hands behind his back, wondering, in a cool, dispassionate way, how long this strain was likely to go on, and whether he would be able to hold out if it lasted for another five minutes. A little detached memory popped up quaintly out of the far-off past. During his first imprisonment, entering the interrogation-room in his turn, he had seen the young man coming out of it drop on the floor in a hysterical fit, and had heard one gendarme say to another :

"That means the General is cross-examining to-day."

He had asked himself, at the time, whether any danger of such a breakdown threatened himself. Nowadays, fortunately, he could feel safe ; his nerves were trained.

A harder ring came into Olive's voice.

"As you say 'altogether,' I suppose it is likely that we may not meet again ?"

"Very likely."

"Then speak the truth to me for once, before you leave me utterly alone. Are you, individually, satisfied with what you have got in exchange for your penny ?"

Karol turned and faced her ; his lips had gone quite white.

"I think," he said, "that it is second-rate, and a bit stale, and certainly dear at the price. But it's the best I can get. If you had asked those peasants in Moscow, they would have told you that sausages, even tainted ones, are not to be had every day."

She was as pale as he was.

"I see," she said at last, under her breath.

It seemed to him that he had been stripped bare of all his personal reserve. He plunged at once up to the ears into statistics ; Karol was not wont to go naked, even under the eyes of his best beloved.

"Then, during the last three years, the death-rate of Lodz . . ."

She stooped to lift the kettle off the fire.

"The death-rate of Lodz is in my notes of yesterday. Just let me make the tea, and I'll fetch them."

The next day she and Karol met only in the presence of others, and the day afterwards her father came up to see her and begged her to go back with him to Heathbridge for the week-end. Returning to town on Monday morning, she went to the office of the periodical to ask instructions for the day's work. Marcinkiewicz, the sub-editor, met her with a face eloquent of trouble. He said nothing, however ; and, as there were strangers in the room, she merely asked :

"Is Dr. Slavinski here to-day ?"

"He has had to go abroad on business. He has left a list of things he wants looked up, and asked

me to tell you that he expects to be back in a fortnight."

Karol was in the habit of taking unexpected journeys; and Olive, accustomed to regard his frequent disappearances as incidental to his work, took the list and settled to her task without comment. The evident distress of the sub-editor suggested to her that the journey might be in consequence of bad news.

"He's been sent for to France or Switzerland to put something right," she thought.

Ten days later, bringing her finished work to the office, she found Marcinkiewicz reading a letter aloud to a member of the party who had lately arrived in England.

"Ah, Miss Latham; I was just going to send round to you. There's a letter from Slavinski, with messages for you."

"Will he be back soon?"

"I'm afraid not; he's wounded."

"Wounded?"

"Yes, he had to go on to Russian territory; disguised, of course. Getting back across the frontier into Austria, he was shot at and hit by the soldiers patrolling the Russian side. He got away, but is laid up now, and can't travel."

"He was crossing the frontier by night, with a smuggler, I suppose?"

"Yes, one of the Jews that take people across at so much a head."

"Is he in Austria now?"

"In Galicia, at Brody. I'll read you what he says:

" 'Everything is satisfactorily settled. . . .'
No, those are all business details ; here it is :
'The patrol caught sight of us as we reached the Austrian side of the ditch, and fired across. Only one shot struck me ; but it has splintered the right thigh-bone. My smuggler behaved very well ; he found friends in the Austrian patrol and persuaded them not to see me ; then, when the alarm had quieted down, he fetched a cart from somewhere and managed to drag me into it. He brought me here safely ; but I have not been able to travel any further. Will you ask Miss Latham to be sure that the child in Union Street with the sequelæ of diphtheria has its throat gargled regularly twice a day ; the mother is a bit careless. The woman at No. 15 had better go as an out-patient to the London Hospital. If an answer has come about the deaf and dumb boy in the Whitechapel Road . . . ' I can't make out the next bit, the handwriting is so shaky. Bielinski, see if you can read it."

While they were trying to decipher the letter a telegram came. Marcinkiewicz gave a quick little cry when he read it.

"What is wrong ?" his friend asked.

He passed the telegram to Olive ; it was from Brody.

"Slavinski very ill. Wound poisoned. Can anyone come ?"

She handed it back without a word.

" 'Wound poisoned,' " Bielinski repeated. "That probably means he'll die. And just for a stupid

frontier patrol firing at random in the dark! It's hard luck."

"Jesus! Mary!" Marcinkiewicz burst out. "You wouldn't have him live, would you? Surely, if he can die comfortably of a gun-shot wound, it's his cheapest way out."

Olive raised her head abruptly, and sat looking at him. She had begun to tremble.

"What do you mean?" Bielinski asked.

"Didn't you know he has had all the warnings of spinal paralysis? Why, yes, you must have noticed the way he walks lately. It's quite a hopeless case; his only chance is to get killed in time by some happy accident."

Bielinski drew back.

"Spinal . . . What, locomotor ataxy do you mean?"

"No such luck! That at least may kill you, sooner or later. This is the sort of deliberately fiendish thing that will let you go on living till you're ninety, just lying helpless year after year, and turning to stone by inches."

He crumpled the telegram passionately in his hand.

"Mother of God! Think of it! and of all men on earth Slavinski, that has worked like any cart-horse ever since he was a boy at college . . . That's what has done it, they say."

"What, overwork?"

"A general accumulation of little bills; cold, and hunger, and fatigue. What can you expect? The man has been through Akatui; no one comes

out of that without something. When it isn't lung disease, or blindness, or epilepsy, or some form of madness, it's as likely as not to be one of these spinal things. And then, you know, he was there through the big famine-strike; that's enough to smash any constitution to pieces."

"But the famine-strike was ten years ago. How long has this been threatening?"

"It has come on very slowly. He says he first noticed a little stiffness of the ankle-joint while he was out there; but it was so slight that he thought nothing of it. He doesn't seem to have guessed that anything was wrong till two or three years ago—no, not the winter before last, the winter before that. It was that time he went to St. Petersburg in such a hurry because they'd dated his passport wrong; don't you remember? He had found himself stumbling in going upstairs, and began to suspect something; so he went and consulted a doctor there. But Miss Latham can tell you better than I can; she was living there at the time."

Both men turned to Olive. She had not moved a muscle. When she spoke, her voice was quite mechanical and even.

"I knew nothing about it. I never heard till now."

The sub-editor bit his lip.

"I'm sorry, Miss Latham. It was tactless of me; but I felt sure he had told you long ago."

"He never was a communicative person," Bielinski put in.

"That is true. He told me simply as a matter of

business, in case I should have to replace him in an emergency at any time. I asked him then whether I could do anything for him in the way of seeing to personal matters, and he said : ' Thanks, my arrangements are made.' I don't know why I took for granted he must have given his instructions to Miss Latham."

" How long ago did he tell you ?"

" When he came to England in May last year. The St. Petersburg doctor, you understand, had only told him there was a danger of some such misfortune. Then he found himself getting worse ; so directly he arrived he went to a man here who is considered a big authority on spinal things, and was told there is no hope. At that, of course, he notified the committee officially, and undertook the work here for as long as it should be possible. Last Saturday week he told me that he had fallen down in the street, and must make arrangements at once for handing over his work. That's what he went into Russia for, to see the new man who is to take his place. There, it isn't a thing that will bear much talking about. Give me a smoke, Bielinski."

His foot tapped on the floor as he rolled a cigarette. He was a man of keen imagination, and Karol was dear to him.

After a moment he smoothed out the crumpled telegram.

" Whom shall we send over ? It says : ' Can anyone come ?' "

Olive rose ; she had sat perfectly still since she heard the truth.

"I am going, of course. I shall start this evening. Will you take me a ticket while I put up my things?"

"But : : ." Marcinkiewicz began ; then checked himself and said gravely : " Yes, you are certainly the right person."

She went back to her lodgings, wrote a few lines to her father, changed a cheque, packed a bag, and caught the boat-train. The only feeling in her mind was a dull content at having something practical to do at once and no time to think. Then followed two nights and days of continuous travelling. Sitting in her corner of the railway-carriage, wide-eyed while her fellow-passengers dozed, she repeated to herself again and again, with ever keener bitterness : " And he never told me—he never told me."

It was late afternoon when she reached Brody, a small frontier town with a mixed population of Poles, Ruthenians, Jews, and a few Germans. The narrow streets looked cheerless and poverty-stricken under a sky heavy with rain-clouds. A figure in a greasy gaberdine shambled up to her at the station gates, thrusting a bestial face over her shoulder as she stepped into a cab.

" Shall I change the lady's money, or show her round the town ? I can recommend a good hotel . . . "

The filthy side-ringlets had almost touched her cheek. As she drove away, an interminable stream of patter, villainous German with here and there a word of broken French, pursued her faintly from the distance, dying away in a fat, snarling whine.

The family whose hospitality Karol had accepted

was of the respectable artizan class. Though Jewish by birth and religion, both husband and wife were devoted Polish patriots, regarded themselves as Poles, and, by dint of heroic pinching and self-denial, regularly contributed a share of their scanty earnings to the funds of the national movement. Karol was personally a stranger to them; but as a prominent organizer wounded in the discharge of his duties he was welcome to anything they had to give.

This, however, was not much. The house was, for its class, fairly clean, but dark, noisy, and crowded; the host and hostess, with all good intentions, had neither the time nor the skill to nurse a difficult surgical case. But the only alternative would have been the local hospital, which, for obvious reasons, it was well to avoid; and Karol had gratefully accepted the kindness of the Jews.

They received Olive with effusive delight.

"Khaña! Khaña!" the husband called to his wife, as the cab drove up. "It's the nurse from London! Run round to the doctor; he said we were to send for him at once."

They almost dragged her into the house, talking shrilly together at the tops of their voices in a debased and incomprehensible mixture of German and Polish; assuring her, with vehement gesticulation, of the anxiety they had felt, of their relief when her telegram came. Neither appeared to feel any doubt that, once she had arrived, the patient must recover.

"And think, if he had died in our house, perhaps by our fault! We're fools at nursing, aren't we, Abraham?"

"Yes, and a life so valuable to the country ! Aie, vaie, what a loss it would have been ! Don't think, because we're Jews, we can't be good patriots ; my wife's brother Solomon was sent to Siberia for taking part in a Polish demonstration. We come from the Russian side, you see ; and I, too, had to make my way across the ditch before . . ."

Olive stopped the torrent as gently as she could.

"You have proved yourselves good patriots by being so kind to Dr. Slavinski. May I wash and change before I go into the sick-room ?"

The doctor, a serious young German with hair standing up like a brush, came in, fortunately, at this moment, and Olive went upstairs with him.

"You must keep these dear people away from the patient," he said, pausing in the narrow, ill-smelling passage. "They are kind, very kind ; they would give him anything, but they talk too much ; he will die of their talking."

"Do you think him likely to die ?"

"How should I know ? If we can have quiet and get the temperature down, he may live. But it looks bad. He has been delirious for three days."

"A broken thigh-bone ?"

"Compound fracture ; and it is septic. He came squeezed up in a little cart, jolted and shaken all the way. Do you speak Polish ?"

"A little."

"I don't ; it is difficult. I have only lately come from Vienna. He talks nothing but Polish since the fever began ; I can't understand. There, do you hear ?"

Karol's voice struck on her ears as the door opened. He was talking to himself, with an arm across his face. She drew the arm down, and skilfully shifted the pillow to ease his breathing. His eyes stared up at her without recognition, and he went on muttering in Polish. The indistinguishable phrases had a faint suggestion of some irregular rhythm.

"Do you understand?" the doctor asked. "He says that again and again, all the time. What is it? A prayer?"

She stooped to listen.

"I can't catch the words; ah, wait a minute."

"... 'The voice of the tombs lamenting, as it were the ashes of the dead complaining against God . . .'"

The words were familiar to her, but she could not remember where she had heard them.

"... 'But the angel . . . the angel . . . spread her wings, and they were still . . . three times the graves began to moan . . .'"

She had been reading Polish literature with Marcinkiewicz, and now remembered the compassionate angel in "Anhelli."

"He is repeating poetry," she said.

The doctor stayed a few minutes in the room, giving her the necessary instructions. He saw at once that she was both intelligent and experienced, and began to have more hope for the patient's recovery. Of the spinal symptoms he had heard nothing.

"Don't be afraid," he said kindly, shaking hands at the door. "I think he will not die."

Olive looked at him, smiling.

"I am not afraid. Even if he should die, it won't matter very much. But I suppose we must try to pull him round; then he can decide for himself whether it is worth his while to go on."

The doctor drew back, and stared at her.

"Dear heaven!" he said to himself as he went downstairs. "What an awful woman!"

When he had gone, Olive sent the kind Abraham for disinfectants and clean linen, and called up Khaia to help her alter the arrangements of the sick-room. Karol had left off tossing and muttering, and lay still, for the moment, with fixed, wide eyes. As she slightly raised his body in her arms to let the Jewess slip the clean sheet under it, three female voices, old and husky, rose from the street below in a quavering, discordant shriek, followed by the jeering cries of street-boys. He moaned under his breath at the sound.

"It's those wretched old painted scarecrows again," said Khaia angrily. "He would give them money the day Mendel brought him here, and we've had no peace from them ever since. They've been round every music-hall in Galicia as long as I can remember, with the same everlasting song about how young and pretty they are, and what a dance they lead the men—the shameless death's-heads! I suppose it's the only one they know. They used to be called the Skipping Sisters. I've heard tell one of them was a beauty flaunting about in Vienna in fine style when our mothers were children. They can't get taken on anywhere now, and they trapes

the streets for coppers. It's a sin in the boys to pelt them, though . . ."

"Hush!" Olive interrupted softly, taking money from her purse. "Will you give them this, and ask them to go further off? We must have no noise here."

The miserable old voices were now screaming out German doggerel rhymes to a horrible tune full of quirks and drawls and foul suggestions.

*"Ach, wie ist es herzlich schön,
Wenn wir drei spazieren gehn. . . ."*

A dreadful look came into Karol's eyes.

"Starving . . ." he muttered. "Starving . . ."

The women were sent away, and he sank into a half-conscious state. Late in the evening Olive heard a cry from the bed that made her heart leap painfully.

"'Arise! It is not yet the time for sleep.'"

His mind was still running on "Anhelli."

She crossed the room to the bedside. He was in a burning fever, struggling to get up. After some time his temperature fell a little, and he lay still. She darkened the room, and sat down by the window. Presently the voice from the bed began again, this time slow and clear:

"'Behold, there is no fowl in the air which hath not slept, in the days of his life, one night in his quiet nest. But me God has forgotten, and I would die.

"'For methinks, when I shall be dead, God Himself will repent Him that He has dealt thus with me,

remembering that I shall not be born again a second time. . . .

“ ‘Therefore am I sad that I have seen the angel ; and I would I had died yesterday.’ ”

She leaned against the window-sill, and covered her face. The voice out of the darkness went on :

“ ‘. . . And she was born from a tear of the Christ on Golgotha, from a tear which was shed for the nations.

“ ‘Also it is written of this angel, child of the Child of Our Lady Mary, how she sinned, having pity on the torment of the black angels ; how she loved one among them, and fled with him into the darkness.

“ ‘Now is she an exile, even as ye are exiles, and her love is given to the tombs of your people ; she is become the shepherdess of them that dwell therein, saying to the dead bones : “Leave your complaining, and sleep.” ’ ”

Olive lifted up her head, and sat listening, breathless, with parted lips and wide eyes in the dark.

“Ach, wie ist es herlich schön. . . .”

The hateful cracked voices quavered up again. Then came a burst of laughter, and a man’s voice, drunken and jeering :

“Give us a kiss, old bag of bones !”

She opened the window. Chill rain struck against her cheek as she leaned out. In the mud of the empty roadway the three old sisters cowered, their tawdry skirts flapping in the wind, their juvenile hats rakishly tipped awry over shameless, brass-coloured

wigs. One of them, hearing the window rattle, looked up, and sobbed out a squalid litany of cold and hunger and the petty persecutions of street-boys, and again cold and hunger. A dishonoured wisp of gray hair, escaping from under the wig, dangled, infamous, against her ruddled cheek.

"A lodging for the night, dear lady! Only a lodging for the night. . . ."

Olive threw down money, motioning them away with a finger on her lip. All three sisters kissed their skinny hands to her as they shuffled down the street.

Karol was moaning under his breath. She went back to the bedside, and stood looking down at him. A faint, mocking quaver trailed in from the distance :

"Ach, wie—ist es—herzlich—schön. . . ."

She thought of Vladimir ; and, for the first time, envied him his good luck. He, at least, was dead.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Dr. Buerger told Olive that the patient was out of danger, she raised her eyebrows slightly, in her father's way, and made no comment. The sense of repulsion, almost of dread, which her callousness had aroused in him at their first meeting, came back upon him for a moment with overwhelming force ; the next instant he found himself sighing because such nurses were not obtainable for his other patients. He went away pondering over the anomaly of anyone taking so much trouble to save a life and then not caring to hear that it was saved.

She cared, indeed, for nothing but to get the sick man back to England as quickly as she could, at almost any cost. The nearness of the Russian frontier haunted her ; waking and asleep, she felt it close ; her broken rest was full of nightmares. With sufficient exercise of pressure in high places, was not a claim for extradition possible ? Or even without that, in a little, sleepy, obscure town, so near to the " ditch," so far from any wide publicity, what might not be done by judicious bribing of petty local officials ? There had been cases, if not here, at least on the Balkan frontiers. Cleverly managed,

the thing would be easy enough. A little black-mailing, a little flattery, a little money, distributed by some smiling Russian agent ; a swift kidnapping on a dark night ; a sham inquiry hugger-mugged in a corner ; then a few vehement protests in the newspapers, a question in Parliament, a diplomatic note or two ; and nothing more. "It has been done," she told herself day after day and night after night ; "why may it not be done again ?"

Under the obsession of this monstrous fear, the other fate which hung over her patient seemed to her less hideous ; anything would be endurable, she thought, if she could bring him safely outside the shadow of Russian influence. Assuredly the end must come soon, but on English soil it could come without terror.

Having no one else to consult, she asked Karol himself, as soon as he was able to understand and answer her, whether he apprehended any danger of a Russian attempt to seize upon him by legal or illegal means.

"Oh, that's all right," he replied, with a faint echo of his old laconic speech. "Kidnapping would be much too risky here ; it's not like Roumania or Turkey ; and as for extradition, the people in Vienna are quite a decent lot. They may possibly turn me out, if the Russians bother them enough, but even then they'll let me choose which frontier."

With so much assurance she had to be content. Indeed, his physical condition left her no option but to wait. The healing of the splintered bone was slow and difficult ; the wound, poisoned by the in-

sanitary conditions of the first night, festered persistently ; and whenever the inflammation subsided for a few days, the pain it had caused always left him in such a state of exhaustion that to inflict upon him the fatigue of a long journey would have been dangerous as well as cruel. He himself, during these rare and short intervals of relief, desired only to sleep, while sleep was possible. For some weeks even his work, the dominant interest of his life, seemed to have faded out of his mind. He lay still, and asked no questions.

As he slowly regained strength, the stiff aloofness of his manner towards Olive grew more noticeable ; it was almost as if he felt her presence a personal annoyance. When, returning to consciousness after the fever, he saw her for the first time, sitting by his bed, he lay looking at her for a long while, and then turned his head away with a broken murmur : " Oh, they might have sent someone else !". Since then he had been icily courteous, with momentary flashes of suppressed resentment which now puzzled, now frightened her.

To her these were terrible weeks. Never before, even when nursing most difficult and critical cases, had she felt so crushed under the weight of her responsibility ; never before had the preservation of a life seemed to her so cruel and so futile. The situation, hard enough in itself, was rendered yet harder for both by a mysterious torment of shyness ; a fierce modesty of early youth, which now fell, a horrible affliction, on the mature man and woman. For the first time in her career as a nurse the neces-

sity of uncovering and touching her patient's body, of washing his wound, of lifting him in her arms, made her ashamed ; he himself, flushing and paling, would mutter with averted eyes : " Can't Abraham do it ? "

She wondered sometimes whether, before the inevitable end, he would forget the distress she now caused him, and be her friend again in the old, simple, priceless way. It was quite natural, she told herself, that he should feel bitter against her just now, but it would be hard if bitterness were to be the last she would have of him.

After all, when one came to analyze it, she had never possessed very much of his friendship. He had pulled her up out of the pit ; had given her courage to live and work to live for ; but he had remained to her a riddle, and now at the end, though she knew his secret, she still knew nothing of him. Even little things such as every patient tells to every nurse were sometimes matters of guesswork ; he had never been free of speech, and was now almost entirely silent. While the acute pain lasted, the rigid set of his mouth was often its sole expression ; slower breathing and a relaxation of the lines told her when it was over.

Seven weeks after her arrival she came into the room one day to dress the wound, and found him reading a letter which Khaïa had brought in. It had a London postmark.

" Marcinkiewicz seems to be in another difficulty with those Lithuanians," he said, without looking up. " He wants to know how soon we are coming back."

"Dr. Buerger thinks you might travel next week. Of course, you will have an invalid-carriage."

"We must try to manage without that; it's too expensive, and the funds are running low."

"My father has sent me plenty of money. I had a letter from him to-day asking me to telegraph when we start. He will cross over and meet us at Calais."

"But we can't put your father to expense and . . ."

"Let him do as he likes, Karol; it's a small matter to you, and very much happiness to him if he can do even a little thing for you."

He reflected for a moment, frowning; then said carelessly: "Very well, if he wishes it," and went on: "In that case, we had better start as soon as Buerger will allow it. I can stand the journey quite well now, and there are things that must be settled."

"Yes, of course."

She hesitated, with quickened breath, gathering courage to break down the unnatural reserve between them."

"Karol, I do know. Marcinkiewicz told me."

In the pause that followed, the ticking of a clock on the table filled her ears with sharp, importunate noise; a tiny sound grown deafening, enormously magnified. When at last he spoke, the tone of his voice made her shrink as though she had been found guilty of some vile indelicacy.

"The worst of Marcinkiewicz is that he is young. He will have to get out of that trick of telling people things."

"He didn't mean to tell me," she stammered.

"He thought . . . I knew . . . thought you would have told me."

"That is what I mean by being young."

She looked at him with a desolate wonder.

"Am I young? I don't feel as if there were much youth left in me, but . . . I too . . . thought . . . you would have told me."

"My dear Olive, if telling things to people will do any practical good, that is a reason for telling. Otherwise, I think, unpleasant news is best kept to one's self."

He added, with punctilious courtesy :

"Certainly, if the thing had been a pleasant one, I would have shared it with you at once; but why should I inflict my personal misfortunes on my friends? You have had far too much bother on my account as it is."

She caught her breath; it was enough to be shut out in the dark, without formal speeches.

"Are we to begin saying polite things to each other, you and I? Of course, you had every right to keep your secret from me, if you wished."

There was a little break in her voice.

"And don't think me stupid enough not to know I've done a brutal thing, dragging you back to life this way. I don't expect you to feel friendly towards me; I've taken away your one chance."

"On the contrary, I am particularly grateful to you for pulling me through. It would have been most inconvenient for me to die just now; my arrangements are not finished."

"Your . . . personal arrangements?"

The immediate hardening of his face warned her that she had trespassed on private ground.

"I was speaking of business. A man's personal arrangements concern no one but himself."

"In that case . . ." She slowly rose, crossed the room, and unlocked a drawer. "I had better give you back this."

He raised his eyes to hers as he took the little bottle from her hand ; and they looked at each other, silent, with white faces.

"You found it on me?"

"Khaïa did ; she gave it to me when I came. It was she who unfastened your clothes after you lost consciousness."

"How much does she know?"

"Nothing beyond the bare fact that it is morphia. When she began talking to me about it, I put her off with a lie ; I told her you had been having toothache in London, and were taking drops for it."

"Thank you," he said, and put the bottle inside his shirt. "That was kind."

She took up a bandage and began to roll it.

"I ought to do the dressing now," she said in a lifeless way.

Taking off the lint, she felt the thigh she touched quiver sharply under her hand, and asked :

"Did I hurt you?"

"Oh no ; I'm a little tired."

He lay with closed eyes till she had finished, and his breathing seemed to her more than usually rapid and distressed. She glanced anxiously at the strained face as she replaced the bed-clothes.

"Thank you," he said, opening his eyes with a little set smile. "I am sorry you should have so much bother with all this."

His right hand, white and shrunken, showing the big bones, fidgeted nervously with the edge of the sheet. She looked at it in wonder; aimless movement of any kind was so unlike Karol. Then a sudden thought of Vladimir's restless, unforgotten, marvellous hands caught her by the throat.

The memory had scarcely flashed through her mind before Karol guessed it. The hand paused for an instant, and slipped under the sheet.

"By the way," he said, after a moment; "as the subject has come up, I ought to explain: the morphia . . . was not intended for immediate use."

She went on smoothing the counterpane. Her voice was monotonous and quiet.

"You will wait till the business arrangements are finished?"

"Probably even longer. You know the progress of this thing is very slow. It may be several months yet, or perhaps a year, before I become quite paralyzed; and there are plenty of things needed that a partially crippled person can do. It is simply a question of being prepared beforehand; one can't know what course it will take."

"Then, later on . . .?"

"When it reaches a stage that prevents my working, I shall naturally dispose of my life in the way most convenient to me."

She stood still, with a hand tightening on the foot-rail of the bed.

"You mean that, so long as it is physically possible for you to be of use to your party, you will hold yourself bound to go on living, whatever the conditions may be?"

The ticking of the clock filled in another silence.

"When I undertook the work, I didn't bargain for pleasant conditions . . ."

His voice dropped, and the sentence was finished in an undertone:

"And . . . perhaps it won't be so long. . . ."

Then he turned his head away quickly; and she, with a pale face, began to put the room tidy.

As soon as she could obtain Dr. Buerger's consent, Olive engaged an invalid-carriage, and made all necessary preparations for the journey. At the last moment, however, her arrangements had to be cancelled; another abscess formed in the wound, and for ten days the patient was too ill to travel.

Meanwhile frosty weather set in. At dawn one morning she found the temperature of the room unduly low, and fetched firewood, moving about softly in felt slippers that Karol might not wake. He had fallen asleep after a fearful night, and lay in an attitude of complete exhaustion, with a haggard face upturned, gray in the dim twilight.

The fuel, which had been kept in a damp cellar, spluttered and smoked for a long time before she could get it to burn. Kneeling by the stove, she shifted the logs with careful hands, pausing now and then to look back over her shoulder at the sleeping man. While so occupied, she amazed herself by bursting into a fit of helpless sobbing. But her

tears had nothing to do with her grief ; they were because of the weariness of her sleepless night, and because the fire would not burn.

When Karol was fit to travel she brought him back to England. On the journey they scarcely spoke without necessity. Baffled and hurt by his freezing reserve, she had adopted, in sheer self-defence, the conventional manner of the trained sick-nurse ; and no one seeing her as she moved about, efficient, quiet and alert, watchful of her patient's bodily needs, indifferent to his personality, could have guessed that he was anything more to her than a stranger on whom she was hired to attend.

Mr. Latham, who met the travellers on Calais pier, noticed the singular restraint between them, but was wise enough to ask no questions. " I wonder which has been having the harder time," he thought, looking from one worn face to the other.

" Have you got lodgings for us ?" she asked when her father turned to walk with her along the windy deck, after a sheltered spot had been found for Karol's stretcher.

" No ; I had a talk with Dr. Morton, and also with your friend of the unpronounceable name. . . ."

" Marcinkiewicz ?"

" That's it. . They both agree with me that you had better come straight to Heathbridge. We can give an invalid more comfort and purer air than he could have in London lodgings."

" But, daddy, what about mother ?"

" Your mother is away ; Jenny has taken her to

spend the winter on the Riviera. It was the child's own suggestion; she thought, with a serious case like this to nurse, you would find it easier at home, so she persuaded your mother to try whether Bordighera will do her neuralgia good. Clever of her, wasn't it? And they'll both enjoy it."

"Will they be away all the winter?"

"Yes; you can turn the house into a hospital, or a workshop, or anything you like, and have your foreigners down for week-ends if they can't refrain from bothering the man while he is ill. I shall just live in my corner and not disturb you, and Dick Grey will fetch and carry for you when the United Old Women's Debating Clubs leave him any free time. Dick's a good fellow, by the way."

She rubbed her hand along his coatsleeve, with a shaky whisper:

"You are, daddy, at any rate."

Karol, when told of the arrangement, looked worried and muttered something about "giving so much trouble," but he was far too weary and depressed to make difficulties, and submitted passively to whatever Olive wished. For her the relief was enormous; her father's restful presence, the loving solicitude with which he and Dick and old Dr. Morton all surrounded her, the tranquil sense of having her patient safe in her own home, with friends to share her weight of responsibility, helped her more than anything else could have done. As for Karol himself, fresh air and quiet, and the luxurious ease of a wealthy country house, soon improved his physical condition; the wound left

off festering, and began to heal. For the rest, he gave his conscientious attention to the matters on which, from time to time, Marcinkiewicz asked his advice, but, unless directly applied to, remained indifferent, too tired to care.

The winter passed uneventfully. After the new year he gradually took up again such of his editorial duties as were possible to a bedridden man; and, raised against the pillows, read business letters and sifted contributions for several hours of every day. Marcinkiewicz came down once a week to report the progress of the work and receive instructions and advice, and Olive gradually slipped back from the position of nurse to that of secretary. Her writing-table was placed in the sick-room; and he dictated from his bed, with a hard, even voice and a face that told nothing.

One day in March, while she was taking down from dictation a long statement of accounts, her father came into the room.

"Am I interrupting your work? I have brought you good news."

Karol laid his papers aside, and looked up with polite attention. News, whether good or bad, had little interest for him nowadays.

"I met Dr. Morton in the lane just now. He seems really to have satisfied himself that the bone is set at last, and says, when he comes to-morrow, he will let you try if you can walk across the room."

Olive, bending her head down over her writing, heard Karol's measured answer:

"That is perhaps rather more than I can

fairly expect to manage just at first ; but we shall see."

"It will be quite a red-letter day for Olive and me," Mr. Latham said, smiling, and passed his hand caressingly over the girl's bowed head. "Won't it, my darling?"

She bit her lip ; and he, feeling her tremble under his hand, went quietly out, not to intrude upon their joy. When the door shut she raised her head. A quick sob rose in her throat as her eyes met Karol's, and was choked back with a passionate effort.

"Karol, we can't keep this up any longer. Why won't you tell them? They must find out to-morrow."

"There is no need for them to find out," he answered in the unmodulated voice that always silenced her. "It may not have gone very much further in these six months ; perhaps I shall be able to stand. And if not, they will only suppose it is weakness ; you know, people usually take some time to get on their feet again after several months in bed."

She made one more effort, desperately.

"Well, granted ; you may be able to deceive them to-morrow, perhaps. And what about next day and the day after?"

"I must invent an urgent need for going to London at once. Marcinkiewicz shall send me a telegram. Anyhow, I should have had to go soon ; I've invaded your father's house quite long enough."

"You know it will only distress him if you go

away, still unable to walk, while the house is at your service. Mother and Jenny will be in Switzerland till June. Karol, he does care about you ; why can't you tell him the truth ?"

"Firstly, because I am not fond of giving people trouble. Your father has been far too generous already, and would insist on trying to do a lot more things for me if he knew. And, secondly, because just at present I have no use for the sympathy of kind friends. I want to go out, when I have to, decently and quietly, without good-byes. Well, then, since you must have all the 'i's' dotted: because I can bear the thing itself, but not any talk about it. We will wait till to-morrow, anyhow. And now, please, I should like to finish these accounts before post-time."

CHAPTER VII

OLIVE passed a wretched night, counting the hours till morning. When she entered Karol's room after breakfast, her father was already there, chatting with his guest, according to his daily custom, before starting for the train.

"I shall try to come back early to-day," he said, as they shook hands; "to hear how you have got on. In the evening, if you feel up to it, perhaps we might go on with that medical manuscript—the fourteenth-century one. I think, with your help, I shall get it clear now. Good-bye, and good luck! Is that you, Morton? I'm just off to my train."

Olive went out of the room with her father. When Dr. Morton called her back Karol was dressed, and sitting on the edge of his bed. The failure of his first attempts to stand in no way disquieted the doctor, who only nodded and smiled, repeating in his cheerful manner:

"Yes, yes, it's sure to be a bit difficult at first. Try again; you'll manage it in a minute."

Olive had turned her back, and stood by the window, wringing her hands unconsciously together. Under the intolerable mockery of the thing, a

bitter wrath against Karol seized upon her. If he could bear it himself, he had no right to force on her this hateful comedy; it was cruel, it was unfair. . . .

"Why, that's splendid! You'll walk as well as I do in a month. Man alive, you must have the constitution of . . ."

The words crashed down on her like hammer-strokes, then a tremendous roaring filled her ears. It died away slowly, and there was silence.

The sound of Dick's voice on the stairs made her drop the hands that covered her eyes. Dr. Morton called to him, triumphant.

"Mr. Grey? Come in and congratulate our patient; he has walked across the room three times. Never saw a thing heal better in my life. Hullo, do you feel dizzy? Lie down a bit. Olive, will you fetch a little brandy?"

"No thanks; I'm all right now," Karol said. He had sat down by the table, with a hand over his eyes. Olive came up to him and touched him on the arm.

"Karol . . . ?"

He caught her hand with a desperate grip, whispering huskily: "Get them out of the room, will you?"

It took her some little time to rid the house of the two cheerful sympathizers. When she had said good-bye to Dr. Morton at the front-door, and sent Dick off on an improvised message, she went back into Karol's room. He was again sitting with an elbow on the table and a hand across his

eyes. As she came in he looked up, very white and stern.

"Would you mind testing the reflexes for me?"

She obeyed. The automatic jerk of the knee, as she struck it sharply with the edge of her open hand, seemed to her scarcely more than normal, but she knew little of spinal affections, and could not judge the significance of the symptom till she saw his face. It was gray and terrible.

"That will do, thanks. Will you ask them not to come in here? I should like to be alone this morning."

During the worst period of his illness he had occasionally made the same request; and she had learned to recognise this imperious need for solitude as the extremest sign, in him, of bodily or mental distress. She went slowly away without a word.

All last night, and all these dreadful months, she had struggled to realize the thing, to prepare herself before the worst should come. Now the worst, it seemed, must be very close. She could have met it, if not with tranquillity, at least with courage, but for the needless cruelty of this mad, momentary hope that had sprung up and withered in an instant. Surely, for no lesser thing than death would any man wear such a look.

She left him to himself till the afternoon. By that time he had recovered his self-command, and accepted her father's congratulations with a placid face. A few days later he came down to dinner on crutches. Dr. Morton and Dick had been invited for the occasion; and Karol appeared in a new

light, keeping the guests in a roar of laughter with racy anecdotes, told in his dry Lithuanian sing-song. Olive, joining in the merriment for courtesy, with a strangled throat and burning eyes, saw an anxious shadow pass once or twice across her father's face. But all the evening he fell in, as a gracious host, with the mood of the others; and gave Olive her good-night kiss at the end without speaking of what he had noticed, if indeed he had noticed anything. Once again, as she went upstairs, she blessed him in her heart for his reticence.

In their several ways they continued a reticent household. Karol, limping about on crutches or sitting at his writing-desk, appeared to occasional callers a cheerful convalescent. With Mr. Latham he chatted pleasantly at evening, or deciphered crabbed manuscripts of mediæval surgery and medicine; but with Olive, in the daytime, he spoke only for necessity. She herself had grown to dread the hours of work with him; it seemed to her that he dwelt alone in an ice-bound world, where her intrusion was an insolence; she felt herself a trespasser among graves.

As Dr. Morton had said that the patient would probably be able to discard his crutches before June, Mr. Latham pressed him to stay till then.

"When you leave this house," he said; "I want to see you walk out by yourself, without artificial aids."

"I shall be puffed up with evil pride when I can do that," he answered lightly, and turned the conversation off to another subject.

The second week in May brought glorious weather, and Mr. Latham coaxed Olive away from her work to ramble with him in the fields and woods.

"You'll be going back to grind in London soon," he said. "You and I and the spring will have a good time together while we can, and Slavinski must just do without you for a bit."

Karol laughingly declared that he should revenge himself by overworking her in London.

"Then make the best of your chances now, my dear," her father said. "Get your hat on, and leave this hard task-master to read the proofs by himself for once."

She obeyed, without lifting her eyes from the ground. How could he joke about it? In her presence, too! How could he . . .

Coming back in the evening, after a long day's excursion, the father and daughter entered the drive together. Karol's books and papers were littered over a table under the chestnut-tree. Apparently he had been working out of doors.

"Look!" Mr. Latham cried out. "He's walking without crutches!"

Karol was in front of them, carrying some books into the house. He walked with evident difficulty, limping badly.

"But he doesn't raise the dust. . . ."

She said the words aloud before she knew it. Her father did not hear; he had run on and overtaken his guest.

"Bravo! Don't overdo it, though. Let me take your books. Will you have an arm?"

"No, thank you; it's all right," she heard Karol answer. She stood watching in the path as he walked on with her father. At the doorstep he paused for a moment, and she remembered Jenny's exclamation of two years back: "There, I knew he'd blunder over the mat!" This time he entered without stumbling, lifting his feet clear of the two steps.

"Why, Olive, what makes you so out of breath?"

Dick had come up the lane behind her. She turned with a start, and saw him leaning on the gate.

"Nothing; I . . . I'm in a hurry, Dick. Good-night."

She ran into the house. As she passed the study-door her father called her in; he was sitting with Karol.

"Slavinski won't be persuaded to stay till next month. Now he can walk without crutches he insists on going back to work."

"Did you think I was going to quarter myself upon you for ever?" Karol asked him. "Do you know that it's five months since I invaded the most hospitable of all houses?"

"Well, stay over next week, anyhow. By the way, I have to go up to London to-morrow for a meeting of the Aristotelians. Shall I look for lodgings for you?"

"I'll do it, father," Olive interrupted hurriedly,

catching at any excuse to avoid an evening alone with Karol. "I must go up to town to see about clothes and . . . lots of things. We'll have a day in town together, and go to a *matinée*. . . ."

She stopped, breathless, feeling Karol's eyes upon her. Mr. Latham looked a little puzzled and anxious, but only said: "That will be delightful," and turned back to his guest.

"I shall have to sleep in town, so we must leave the commentary on Averroes till to-morrow. Perhaps we may get the manuscript finished next week."

In the morning Olive and her father went up to town, and parted at the station, agreeing to meet for lunch and go to a theatre together. One of her errands took her through the Cavendish Square district, and, passing a corner house, she noticed on a doorplate the words "Sir Joseph Barr." She had walked on a little way, repeating the name mechanically to herself, before it struck her that this was the authority who had told Karol his illness was incurable.

She stood for a moment hesitating; then, with a swift impulse, walked back to the house and rang the bell hastily, not daring to stop and think. In the waiting-room she leaned on the table and fluttered the pages of a magazine. "I have no right to do it without asking his consent," she told herself. "But I can't go on like this. I must know the truth."

After an hour of waiting she was called into the consulting-room, and stated her business. Sir Joseph remembered Karol at once.

"Ah, yes, a Polish exile, wasn't he? Let me see, when was it he came to me?"

"Two years ago this month."

He looked up the case in his notebook.

"And you find his gait more normal since this long illness?"

"He is very lame still, and is only beginning to walk without crutches; but he doesn't seem to catch his feet against the ground as he did last year."

"Have you spoken to him about it? He is a doctor himself, I think?"

She shook her head.

"I have not dared to; it may only be my fancy, and to raise a false hope . . ."

"Quite possibly a true one. The disease is usually considered incurable; but in a few cases that have been recorded lately perfect rest in time has stopped the morbid process. When he came to me I told him to lie up and have a long holiday in bed; but he pleaded pressure of work, and I didn't insist because I thought the thing had gone too far already for any real hope of cure. There is just a chance that this gun-shot wound may have saved him. Yes, I should very much like to see him again."

"He is coming up to town the week after next."

"I shall not be here; I am going abroad next Monday for a month."

She crushed her hands together in her lap. A whole month. . . .

"Would you . . . can you spare the time to come to Sussex and see him? I don't know whether I could persuade him to come up for a consultation. He is so hopeless about it; I scarcely dare ask him. . . ."

He glanced at the calendar.

"I would come, certainly, but every date is filled up; there is only this evening. I am free after six. The Brighton line, is it?"

"There's a good evening train down and a late one back. If you could come . . . you see, it would save him the long suspense."

The pavement heaved under her feet as she left the house. Sending a hurried message to warn her father not to expect her, she took the first train back to Heathbridge. When she came in, Karol looked up in momentary surprise, then his face darkened.

"Karol . . ."

She broke off.

"You have been to see Barr?"

Her eyes dilated. There was something terrifying to her in the way he guessed everything.

"I . . . You have a right to be annoyed, I suppose . . . but I couldn't stand it any longer. He is coming this evening."

"Here?"

"Yes. I begged him to."

Karol looked out of the window for a moment.

"It seems almost a pity to bring a big man like that down here, doesn't it? Of course, I had meant to go to him in London. But

it doesn't matter, only for the extra expense. Thank you, Olive; it was kind of you to think of it."

She turned away, sick at heart. If he would only be angry, nervous, despondent . . . Anything would be less horrible than this indifference.

All the evening she wandered restlessly about the house and garden. To be in the room with Karol while the suspense lasted was unbearable to her. He, with a face of iron, sat holding an open book in his hand; but an hour passed before he turned a page.

About nine o'clock the sound of wheels on the gravel brought her back into the study. Karol laid his book down without a word.

"Sir Joseph Barr."

She put a shaking hand on the table to steady herself as she rose. Just for a moment the room heaved and swam as the London street had done in the morning; then everything was quite simple and commonplace, and she listened to the questions and answers as though she were back in the hospital ward of her training days, hearing the fate of a stranger decided, and wondering that she did not care more.

Sir Joseph stooped and tested the reflexes.

"Your luck!" he murmured.

Karol's voice had fallen so low that she could scarcely hear it.

"Then do you think it will be a permanent cure?"

"It's early to say that. Of course, there must be no more hardship, or overfatigue, or knocking about; and, however careful you are, I can't promise yet that it won't return. But you have a real chance; two years ago I wouldn't have believed it possible. How old are you? Under forty? Why, if you lead a reasonably easy life, and take a little care of yourself, there may be twenty or thirty years' work in you yet."

"I seem to get more than my fair share of luck in life," Karol answered, smiling, and repeated under his breath: "Thirty years. . . ."

When Sir Joseph left to catch his train, Olive went out to the porch with him. She stood for a long time on the doorstep alone, looking up over black tree-tops at a sky glorious with stars; but even stars could not help her to-night. Turning away at last, she went through the house methodically, fastening bolts and putting out lights. It was late, and the servants had gone to bed.

"Is that sash too heavy for you?"

She was shutting the staircase window, and, turning quickly with a hand on the banister, saw Karol standing in the study doorway. His face, in the dim light from the room, seemed to her a mask of tragic indifference. She came down the steps, implacable, accusing.

"How long have you known?"

"That it is getting better? I found it out the first time I tried to walk, of course. I would rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. Do you want the study windows bolted too?"

He went back into the room. She followed, and, stepping swiftly between him and the window, confronted him in a blazing fury.

"Karol, I didn't . . . think you would have treated me so. . . . It was a heartless thing. . . . I will never forgive you as long as I live. . . . There, I don't want to say any more. . . . Good-night. . . ."

He put out a hand and stopped her as she turned to go.

"Wait a minute. When you say things of that sort, it's well to give a reason. What have I done to forfeit your goodwill?"

"What you have done! Haven't you known for eight weeks . . . there was hope . . . and kept me believing . . . Oh, how could you . . . how could you . . . !"

She began to choke suddenly.

"You have always shut me out. . . . That was your right, if you chose. . . . But to keep even good news from me . . ."

A kind of flash passed over his face. Then he turned away from her, shrugging his shoulders; and she knew instantly that he did not count the news as good. She stretched out both hands to him.

"Karol . . . Karol . . . Oh, I didn't understand. . . ."

Her voice died out.

"You see," he said at last; "I had got accustomed."

She only covered her face. After a long pause,

she came up to him softly and put a hand on his sleeve. He started and drew back.

"No, no ; let that be !"

He turned towards her, sombre and violent, his eyes black with a sullen revolt.

"The truth is, I'm a bit sick of being shuttlecock. A man has a right to get tired some time. You can face death, of course, if you have to, or life either for that matter ; but to be tossed backwards and forwards between the two, and have to keep readjusting the focus . . . and anyway I've had my share. . . ."

He checked himself hastily.

"I really beg your pardon, Olive ; I seem to be in a captious mood to-night. It's well to avoid these personal subjects, I think ; there's no use in talking about them."

He stooped over the writing-table, collecting his papers in a flurried way, very unlike his usual slow deliberateness of movement. A little heap of newspaper cuttings, catching in his sleeve, jerked away from the metal clip that held the scraps together. He took up the clip, and turned it over in his hand, looking persistently away from Olive.

"I'm very sorry if you are hurt," he went on. "Perhaps I ought to have told you. But I . . . didn't feel cheerful about it. I should have told you if I had thought . . ."

She interrupted him savagely.

"If you had thought . . . what ? That I should care ? Ah, for God's sake, what else have I got in the world to care about ?"

The paper-clip broke in his hand. He threw the bits away, and they fell to the floor with a small, clear tinkle.

"What do you mean?" he said, and came up to her, quiet and dangerous. "What do you . . ."

They stood looking at each other. Then he caught her by the shoulders with a furious cry, and kissed her on the mouth.

He wrenched himself out of her arms the next instant, putting up a hand to keep her off.

"Look here, you and I have gone mad—stark mad, both of us. Did you think . . ."

He sat down at the table, covering his eyes with one hand.

"Did you think I should be brute enough to . . . marry you with a thing like this hanging over me? . . . How do I know it won't come back? You heard what he said. . . . Love? Ah, Jesus, Mary! You needn't worry about that! I've loved you enough, ever since . . . What has that got to do with it? Don't you see it's just as if I were dead too, like Volodya? Except for the work . . . I suppose I must go on working as long as it will let me; but I'm not going to share a life of this sort with anybody else. . . . Take your hands away! This particular bit of hell is mine, and I'll keep it to myself. . . ."

"But you can't. It's not yours any longer; it's ours."

She was kneeling beside him, her arms round his neck. He pulled them away, with a fierce grip on her wrists.

"Do you want to risk being tied to an unburied corpse all your days? Ah, you don't understand what the thing means; it's so easy to say: 'Paralysis.'"

She felt the fingers holding her wrists quiver with the horror that shook him.

"You can't die of this, mind. You don't go mad. You lie still and grow stiff, every year just a little stiffer. . . . Then it begins to crawl upwards. . . . Ah, if I had died in Akatui . . ."

"But, Karol, there is always morphia."

The hands dropped from her wrists. Still kneeling, she slipped her arms again round his neck.

"You don't think I should want you to go on living just for me, if you yourself thought it was better not? Can't you trust me more than that? It won't come to the worst, indeed it won't; but if it ever should, you have only to tell me you want the poison."

"And you . . . would give it?"

"Don't you know I would kill you myself rather than let you fall into their hands alive? Why not for this as well? I would have poisoned Volodya, only I had no time. But while you are here . . . Oh, Karol—Karol, don't; it's not worth that!"

She cowered down in terror, hiding her face against his knee. She had thought life held no longer any dread that could so dismay her; but tears from Karol . . . It was as though the world were coming to an end.



Dawn found them still together. They had sat through the night, unconscious of the passing hours ; silent at first, then talking softly, of Akatui, of Wanda, chiefly of Vladimir. Now, as always, the dead man was the closest of the ties between them.

"Come out and see the sunrise," Karol said. "It is not indoors that one should remember Volodya."

They drew back the door-bolts, quietly, not to wake the sleeping household, and walked through the dewy garden hand in hand.

The shrubbery path ended in a little gate, leading to a green and golden meadow. White hawthorn petals clung to Olive's hair as she came out from the shadow of the trees into the level sunlight. Very far up in a pearly sky, a lark was singing.

Stooping to lift the latch of the gate, Karol felt the touch of the girl's fingers on his hand. He raised his head, and saw her looking out over the meadow.

"Did you see that butterfly? This is like a story I once heard Volodya tell the children, about a Green Caterpillar and a land called To-morrow, where all the stars fly down to sleep and all the caterpillars turn to butterflies. I have thought—oh, for so long—it was all a mistake, and there wasn't any To-morrow Country. But, you see, he was right ; this is To-morrow."

Karol pointed down at the grass.

"And all the stars are here. The little gold things

are merciful ; they come even to Akatui. Next month Volodya's swamp will be thick with them too."

The stars of last night's heaven had fallen to earth, and lay about their feet as buttercups.

THE END

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